Includes RECIPES for 45 ONE-OF-A-KIND MIXED DRINKS
The
WILDCRAFTED
COCKTAIL
from the MERRY WOODSMAN
to the SILVERBERRY SOUR
MAKE YOUR OWN
Foraged
SYRUPS, BITTERS, INFUSIONS, AND GARNISHES
ELLEN ZACHOS, AUTHOR OF BACKYARD FORAGING

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my father, Kimon Zachos. Dad didn't drink, but he believed in having a fully stocked bar for friends and family to enjoy. I wish he were here so we could toast the publication of this book. Apparently an interest in and appreciation for mixology is something you can inherit. Or at least share. Thanks, Dad.

I have many people to thank for helping me with this book. My loyal team of proofreaders, Michael, John, and Elizabeth, have never failed me. The professional mixologists who contributed recipes were creative and excited to experiment with foraged ingredients. And the sensational Butter Wilde generously gave of her time and extraordinary talents to help me in the kitchen.

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INTRODUCTION

Why Foraged Mixology?

Why would anyone want to forage for cocktail ingredients? It's so much easier to go to a liquor store, or a grocery store, or a farmers' market. Why would you choose to tromp through the woods, hunt down some edible plants, carry them home, clean them off, and figure out how to use them in a cocktail?

Foraging has its own unique pleasures. Though we no longer need to forage to survive, many of us still find it fascinating and satisfying. Is it the lure of free food? The thrill of the hunt? The promise of unbuyable flavors? For people who appreciate unusual tastes, wild edibles offer exciting ingredients and new opportunities.

If you're already a forager, many of the ingredients in this book will be familiar to you. If you've never foraged before, welcome to the club! There's a recommended reading list at the back of the book to help you learn more about edible plants in your area. Pick one or two field guides and really get to know your plants. I can't stress enough how important proper plant identification is.

PICKING WILD THINGS

Foraging is only fun when it’s safe, and it’s your responsibility (if you’re old enough to drink, you’re old enough to be responsible) to make intelligent, educated choices about what you choose to eat.

Take a class, join an online wild foods group or local foraging club, read everything you can get your hands on. If you know of a local bar or restaurant that serves wild foods, try some foraged flavors to see if you like them. Some of the ingredients in this book can actually be purchased in stores, online, and in herb shops. If you're curious about whether something is worth the work of hunting and gathering, try buying a bit of it if possible and see what you think. I guarantee that wild foods will taste even better when you've harvested them yourself.

One of the best things about foraging is that you harvest wild edibles at their peak and use them, or preserve them, when they're at their most delicious. No one picks cornelian cherries before they're ripe or Japanese knotweed when it's passed its tender best. The wild foods you'll use in these cocktails have limited seasons when they're ripe and ready. You'll capture those seasonal flavors and use them to create cocktails that represent a specific moment and place. It's almost magical, and it makes your cocktails unique.

As a forager, I look for delicious wild plants wherever I go, and I try to use as many as possible in my daily life. After hunting for mushrooms, greens, fruits, and nuts, my idea of a good time is a weekend in the kitchen playing with what I've found. That includes both food and drink. With the craft cocktail movement in full swing, it makes perfect sense to bring foraged ingredients into the bar as well as the kitchen.

I've made wild wines and meads for years, but my interest in foraged mixology took a big step forward when I was hired by Rémy Cointreau USA to teach a series of foraged mixology workshops across the country for The Botanist gin. I

introduced bartenders to the wild plants they could forage in their areas, and together we turned them into unusual cocktails. I'd fallen hard for The Botanist a year before meeting anyone from Rémy, which was nice, because I wouldn't endorse a product I didn't think was terrific. Not ever. That's a promise.

I enjoy a wide range of spirits, and writing this book has been a joy, as I've tested different distilled flavors and combined them with some of my favorite wild edibles. It's a whole new way to incorporate unbuyable flavors into your daily ritual. Come have a drink with me.

Eating wild plants and fungi is inherently risky. Individual people may make mistaken identifications regardless of their level of expertise or the accuracy of printed information, and they also vary in their physiological reactions. The publisher and the author cannot accept responsibility for readers'

health. Eat wild foods at your own risk, and always drink responsibly.

CHAPTER ONE

Anatomy of a Foraged Cocktail

What is a cocktail? The first mention of a cocktail as an alcoholic beverage dates from 1806, when it was defined as a drink composed of spirits, sugar, water, and bitters. Since then, mixologists and adventurous drinkers have taken this definition and run with it, creating vast and varied categories of alcoholic beverages that include everything from sours, highballs, and spirit-forward cocktails to flips, fixes, rickeys, collinses, juleps, smashes, and tiki drinks.

Don’t worry, I promise there isn’t a quiz at the end of this section. All you need to know is that each of these categories is defined by the type of ingredients that go into it. For example, a sour is made up of a base spirit, citrus juice, sugar, and (if you like) an egg. A highball is a base spirit, ice, and a usually carbonated mixer. Once you understand the general outline of a cocktail, you can play around with foraged ingredients within the form.

Maybe you'll start by simply substituting wild ingredients for more traditional cocktail components. Can you use pickled field garlic in place of a pickled onion in your next Gibson? Or cornelian cherry syrup in place of grenadine in your next Tequila Sunrise? The answer to both questions is yes, of course you can.

The easiest way to start incorporating foraged ingredients into your cocktails is by making some simple substitutions. You're probably familiar with traditional ingredients like lemon juice, simple syrup, and soda, but can you capture those same flavors with wild ingredients? Absolutely. Here are a few useful foraged substitutes. With these basics in your refrigerator, you're off to a good start.

Sour Juices

Sour flavors are essential for creating a balanced cocktail. Personal tastes will vary, but you'll always want to consider your ratio of spirit:sour:sweet. It's all about the balance. The word *verjuice* is French for "green juice" (green in the sense of unripe, not the color green). If you live in a citrus-friendly climate, go ahead and pluck a ripe lemon whenever you need some acidity in your drink. The rest of us can choose from several tart wild edibles, including crab apples, silverberries, currants, and unripe grapes. It's important that whatever fruit you use be *extra* sour, so taste what you're harvesting as you go.

IN THE SPIRIT

A spirit-forward cocktail usually contains a strong distilled spirit, vermouth or fortified wine, often bitters, and sometimes a liqueur or syrup. These are strong drinks in which all or most of the ingredients contain alcohol.

GRAPE VERJUICE

Unripe grapes are smaller and less juicy than ripe grapes, so you need lots of fruit to make verjuice. It's important to work quickly during the first few steps to minimize oxidation. Exposure to the air turns the juice from yellow to brown. It will taste fine, but it won't be as pretty. The flavor of a good grape verjuice will be almost indistinguishable from that of lemon juice.

Unripe grapes are hard, and you'll need a food mill to crush them, as well as a mesh sieve and paper coffee filters for straining the juice. One pound of unripe grapes yields approximately ¾ to 1 cup of juice.

Load your food mill with its coarsest plate and some grapes, place it on top of a bowl, and start grinding, which takes some hand strength. You'll end up with a rough mixture of juice and pulp. Don't worry if a few seeds make it into the bowl.

Next, put on a pair of rubber or latex gloves. Unripe grapes are full of acid (that's what makes them so sour), and this can sting your hands after prolonged exposure. Place the sieve over another bowl and squeeze handfuls of grape pulp over the sieve to release maximum juice.

Moisten a paper coffee filter so that it absorbs as little juice as possible. Set the moistened filter in the sieve over a clean bowl. Pour the juice through the filter. When sediment builds up in the filter, wet and use a new one.

Pour the filtered juice into a mason jar, cover, and refrigerate the verjuice for 24 to 48 hours. At this point you should see a

layer of sediment on the bottom of the jar. Gently pour the liquid off the sediment into a clean jar, and there you have it: verjuice!

Verjuice will keep in the refrigerator for several months.

PICKING WILD GRAPES

Wild grapes (*Vitis* spp.) don't come with name tags, so you may not know exactly what kind of grapes you've foraged. Fortunately, if you're making verjuice, that doesn't matter. The important thing is that the unripe grapes must be very sour. Most grapes you'll find growing wild originally descended from domesticated grapes. Truly wild grapes usually have smaller fruit than cultivated or feral grapes, but they still have lots of flavor.

SILVERBERRY JUICE

Silverberries (a.k.a. sweet autumn olives) are invasive shrubs in the eastern half of the United States. The National Park Service has asked that no one plant silverberries, and since each fruit you pick is a seed that won't have a chance to germinate . . . well, that makes harvesting silverberries like doing a public service, doesn't it? Each shrub produces large amounts of fruit, making it easy to gather plenty in a short time.

You'll need a food mill for crushing the berries and a jelly bag for straining. The resulting juice is slightly less tart than lemon juice or grape verjuice, and it has a light pink color.

In terms of juiciness, silverberries are more like blueberries than grapes. Two cups is a good minimum amount to start with and should yield on the order of ¾ cup of juice.

Pull out your trusty food mill, place it over a bowl, and run the fruit through it. Don't worry if seeds get into the bowl; you're just breaking open the fruit to release the juices. Transfer the fruit to a jelly bag and strain into a mason jar, squeezing every last bit of liquid out of the pulp.

Silverberry juice will keep in the refrigerator for several months. It will separate, though, so be sure to shake it up before using it in your cocktails.

PICKING SILVERBERRIES

Silverberries (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) look ripe long before they actually are. Immature fruit is highly astringent, so wait until the fruit is soft before you harvest. Start tasting in September (depending on where you're located), and when the fruit is pleasantly tart, go ahead and harvest. This could be 3 to 4 weeks after the berries are fully colored. They may even look slightly shriveled by the time they're ready to pick.

SILVERBERRY SOUR

Silverberry is one of my favorite foraged fruits, and not because it's high in vitamin C and lycopene, an antioxidant. Let's just get this out of the way right now: healthy food is not my primary concern. I love the flavor of silverberry and the fact that each shrub produces copious amounts of fruit.

Silverberry juice is a great substitute for lemon juice and can be used any time you don't mind a little pink in your drink. But it's more than just an accent of acidity — it's delicious, and it deserves a drink all its own.

If you don't have schisandra berries for making the syrup for this recipe, you can use plain old simple syrup, but the extra layers of spice you get from schisandra are worth foraging for. The raw egg white adds a nice creaminess to the drink without diluting the flavor. If you use the egg white, be sure to top the cocktail with a few dashes of light bitters, like the sumac bitter. If you skip the egg white, you can also skip the bitters.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces pisco
- **1** ounce silverberry juice
- **1** ounce schisandra syrup
- **1** tablespoon egg white
- Sumac bitters

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the pisco, silverberry juice, schisandra syrup, and egg white in a shaker and dry-shake for 30 seconds. Add ice and shake again for 30 seconds to thoroughly chill the cocktail. Strain into a rocks glass and top with a few drops of bitters.

USING EGG WHITES

Bitters and egg whites go together like scotch and soda. Egg whites can begin to smell a bit off (that's a polite way of saying "like a wet dog") when they oxidize. A few drops of bitters keeps the cocktail fresh. Magic!

Sweeteners

Because sugar doesn't dissolve easily in cold liquids, many cocktail recipes call for syrups, which may vary in their proportions of sugar to water. The difference among these syrups is not only the degree of sweetness but also the mouthfeel. A rich syrup (twice as much sugar as water) is much silkier than a simple syrup (equal parts sugar and water). A light syrup (twice as much water as sugar) is lighter and thinner on the tongue. Simple syrups are the most versatile and most commonly called for behind the bar.

Making flavored varieties allows you to add foraged flavor and sweetness to your drink with a single pour. Syrups may be flavored with mushrooms, herbs, flowers, nuts, or any other wild edible — once you start playing with foraged flavors, you may never settle for plain old simple syrup again. For example, acorn orgeat adds not only sweetness but also a subtle nutty flavor; you almost can't identify it, but you certainly miss it when it's not there.

Here is a recipe for making basic simple syrup; see chapter 3 for more on making foraged syrups.

BASIC SIMPLE SYRUP

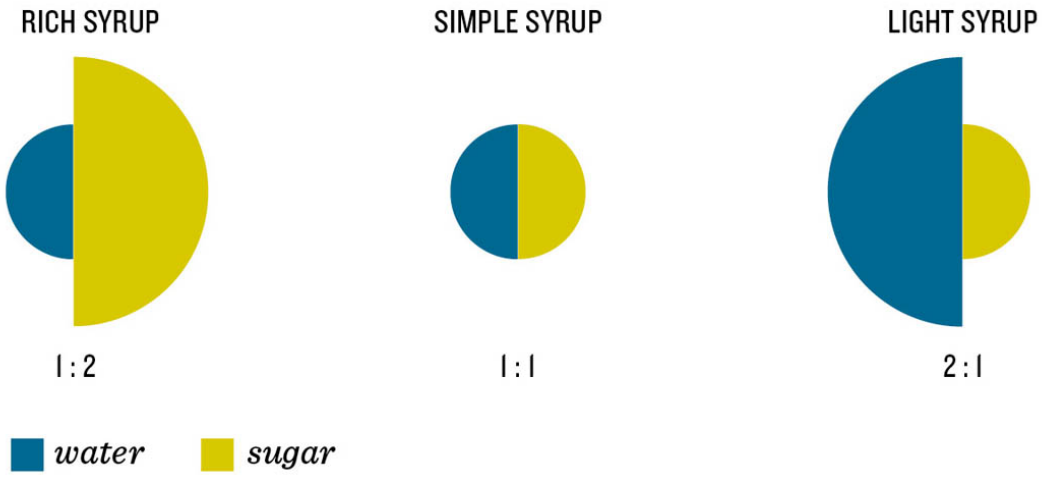
INGREDIENTS

- **1** cup water
- **1** cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the water and sugar in a saucepan and bring to a boil, whisking to dissolve the sugar. Remove from the heat, cover, and let cool.

Strain the cooled liquid into a bottle or jar, seal, and refrigerate. The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave ¼ inch headspace.



ABOVE: *Making simple syrup*

Sodas/Seltzers

Sodas are essential to many cocktails; you'll often hear them referred to as mixers. It's easy to make foraged sodas, like sumac soda and nettle cordial soda, but they're so tasty, you run the risk of having them outshine the base spirit.

SUMAC SODA

Makes 1 quart

To make sumac soda, you need to first make sumac-ade, then run the chilled sumac-ade through a soda siphon to carbonate it. I'm often asked if you can do this with a SodaStream, and while the answer is a qualified yes, I don't recommend it. First of all, it voids the SodaStream warranty. Second (and more importantly), you may have a big, messy explosion on your hands if the liquid isn't unsweetened and 100% clear.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** cups dried sumac berries
- **1** quart room-temperature water

INSTRUCTIONS

To make sumac-ade, combine the sumac berries with the water and stir vigorously for 2 minutes. Let the mixture sit for several hours (or overnight), until the infusion is dark pink in color. Strain the liquid through a coffee filter and refrigerate.

Sumac-ade can be *very* sour. Taste it before carbonating and if you want a sweeter soda, add sugar incrementally until it tastes good to you. You want to preserve the tart flavor, so it's better to start slow rather than oversweeten.

PICKING SUMAC

All sumac shrubs with red berries (*Rhus* spp.) are safe to eat. Poison sumac (*Toxicodendron vernix*) is a rare plant; it grows in swamps, bogs, and wetlands in the eastern United States and has loose, hanging clusters of white fruit. Stick with red-berried sumac and you'll be just fine.

Sumac berries are at their most tart and delicious immediately after ripening. The sour flavor comes from a combination of acids that coat the fruit. These acids are washed away by rain, so gather your sumac as soon as possible after the berries ripen. The acid reaccumulates a few days after each rain, but the berries become progressively less tart (and less tasty) with each successive downpour.

SUMAC SPRITZER

Guest Mixologist: Emily Arseneau

Emily Arseneau is a hospitality consultant who landed her first bartending gig in 2006 at a pool hall in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. One dive, two pubs, a beer garden, and a few restaurants later, she arrived at Spirit of '77 in Portland, Oregon. It would change her perspective on eating and drinking forever.

Emily is now a proud resident of Dallas, Texas, where she has bartended at local favorites like The Porch and managed the bar program at Victor Tangos. Emily has also consulted for HG Sply Co., which focuses on clean eating and drinking, and the Truckyard, an Austin-inspired food truck park and bar. She is a frequent contributor to the *Dallas Morning News* cocktail lifestyle blog.

Emily has worked as a brand advocate for Sailor Jerry spiced rum and is currently collaborating with an international bartenders' collective, Collectif 1806, which focuses on cocktail education. Emily appreciates both the traditional and the innovative when it comes to cocktails. She chose The Botanist gin for this cocktail because its complex botanical flavors truly shine in a simple recipe.

INGREDIENTS

- **1½** ounces gin (preferably The Botanist)
- **1** ounce simple syrup
- Sumac soda

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the gin and simple syrup in a collins glass, then fill the glass with ice. Top off with sumac soda and stir.

BLESS YOU

Elderflowers are all the rage these days. I get it. They're delicate and pretty and have a seductive flavor. But what about elder*berries*? It's almost as if people have forgotten all about the bold fruit that follows those delicate blooms.

Maybe it's because the flavor of raw elderberries is slightly to extremely awful. Thankfully, someone figured out that the application of heat and the addition of sugar makes for a beautiful dark purple/blue syrup with a sweet, deep, fruity flavor. Some say the taste is similar to that of blackberries, but I think they're fooled by the color. Elderberries have their own worthy flavor.

Benedictine is an herbal liqueur whose main ingredients are angelica, hyssop, and lemon balm. Is it any wonder a forager would be drawn to its complex, plant-based flavors? It's a very sweet liqueur, so I only use it in small doses. Here it adds a subtle herbal background to the more assertive elderberry. Plus, it inspired the cocktail's name.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces vodka
- **1** ounce elderberry syrup
- **1** teaspoon Benedictine
- **2** ounces sumac soda

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

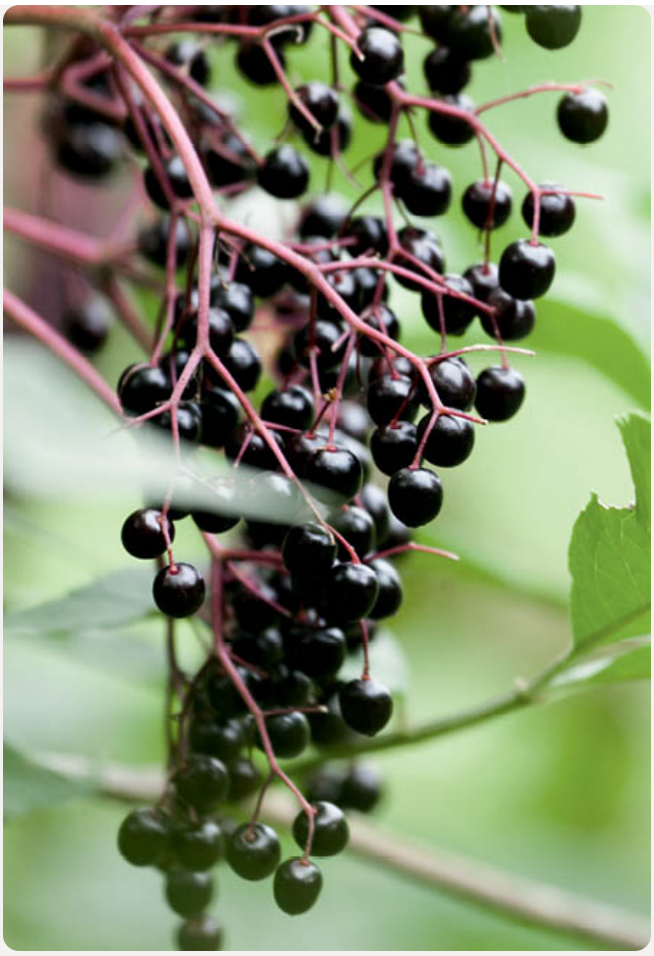
Combine the vodka, elderberry syrup, and Benedictine in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a rocks glass and top with sumac soda.

Note: When prepping elderberries for juicing, be sure to remove all the big stems. And one more word of warning: elderberry juice stains, so work carefully or wear an apron!

PICKING ELDERBERRIES

Elderberries (*Sambucus* spp.) ripen in large umbels of blue/black fruit, making it easy to pick several cups very quickly. There are different species of blue-fruited elderberries and they're all edible. Red-fruited elderberries are more controversial. Some people say they're toxic and others say they're not. But everyone agrees they don't taste very good, so don't bother!

Forager's Tip: After harvesting your elderberries, put them in the freezer. It's much easier to separate the frozen fruit from the stems than it is when the berries are fresh.



NETTLE CORDIAL SODA

Stinging nettles are a much loved wild green, a favorite among foragers. I harvest as many nettles as I can in spring, then blanch and freeze them to use all year round. I used to throw away the cooking water, but not anymore! That liquid, a.k.a. pot liquor, is not only nutritious (it contains vitamin C, vitamin A, and minerals, including calcium, potassium, zinc, and iron), it's also full of flavor. Some foragers drink it straight, as a medicinal tea. I prefer to make mine into a delicious cocktail ingredient.

INGREDIENTS

- Nettle pot liquor
- Wild ginger rhizomes
- Agave nectar
- Lemon slices

INSTRUCTIONS

I blanch several batches of nettles in a single pot of water, straining the greens and saving the water to cook the next batch. I do this for several reasons: it saves water, the cooking water is already hot (so it speeds up the blanching process), and it yields an extra-strong nettle tea, which makes for a lovely cordial.

To make nettle cordial, strain the pot liquor through cheesecloth or a very fine mesh strainer to catch all the bits and pieces of nettle leaf. For every quart of nettle pot liquor, add 1

tablespoon chopped fresh wild ginger rhizomes or 1 teaspoon dried rhizomes and ¼ cup agave nectar. Bring the liquid to a boil, then remove from the heat and add three or four slices of lemon. Cover the pot and let it sit for 24 hours. The following day, strain off the solids, bottle the liquid, and refrigerate. It will keep, chilled, for several weeks.

Run the nettle cordial through a soda siphon to carbonate. The sweetener in nettle cordial makes it unsuitable for carbonating in a SodaStream.

PICKING NETTLES

There are several species of edible nettles, but the stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is the most common. The stems and undersides of stinging nettle leaves are covered with tiny, hollow hairs (trichomes) that contain several chemicals, including histamine and formic acid. When the hairs are broken — when you touch the leaves, for example — they release the chemicals, which causes the infamous sting.

Nettles are most tender and tasty in spring, before they flower. Use sturdy gloves (the stingers can penetrate light cloth) to pick the top several pairs of leaves and stems. Nettle stingers are destroyed by cooking and drying; either method renders this tasty plant harmless.

THE STINGER IN THE RYE

Rye is a cool-climate grain. It makes me think of characters in a Strindberg or Ibsen play, silently harvesting their rye as the sun sets at three in the afternoon. And while nettles grow in a wide range of climates, there's something austere about them that fits with the whole "peasants harvesting rye" image.

Perhaps that's because they sting, which means we must suffer to attain our goal, much as the characters in those Strindberg and Ibsen plays always seemed to be suffering for some reason. Those people were never happy. I think they needed more cocktails.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces rye whiskey
- Nettle cordial soda

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Pour the rye over ice in a rocks glass. Top up with nettle cordial soda and serve.

Building a Foraged Cocktail

There are several ways to approach the process of creating a foraged cocktail. Simple one-to-one substitutions, trading new foraged flavors for traditional ingredients, are a great way to build confidence and get started with wild cocktails. They allow you to flex your muscles and explore the vast world of wild edibles. As you become familiar with foraged flavors, you may want to try entirely new flavor combinations. Opportunities abound for wild experimentation.

Let's look at how a traditional whiskey sour — made with whiskey (base spirit), lemon juice (something sour), sugar (something sweet), and, sometimes, egg whites — morphed into the Cascadian Sour.

After harvesting a quart of Oregon grapes, I made syrup from the fruit. The grapes are a gorgeous deep purple and, even in syrup form, quite tart. Oregon is a cool and rainy place, which made me think of rye whiskey, made from a grain that

grows well in cool temperatures. Verjuice is an obvious substitute for lemon juice, and I added a few drops of licorice fern bitters because I'd foraged the licorice fern in Washington State, which is right next door to Oregon. That part of the country is known as Cascadia, hence the name. It's like a game of free association, where one flavor leads you to the next. In the end you have an entirely different (yet somehow familiar) drink.

Finding Inspiration

Or a recipe might come to you in a flash of inspiration. I once brought home some ripe carissa fruit from a trip to Florida, and while I appreciated the sweetness and bright pink beauty of its flesh, the flavor was a little bland. I hadn't tried working with it, but I kept thinking about how I might use it. I thought about it a lot. Thanks to my very active subconscious, I woke up one morning with the fully formed recipe in my head — carissa with white rum and schisandra syrup — and tested it before breakfast. Nailed it! (See Two Sisters.)

Occasionally I think of a name for a cocktail and build the drink around that. I find it much harder to name a drink than to create a drink, so when I get a good name I hesitate to let it go. That's how the Gunwale Jumperwas born. The title conjured up memories of summer camp and northern lakes surrounded by spruce trees and blueberry bushes. I worked from there.

Of course there are failures. I'd rather not go into specifics, but every mixologist ends up pouring booze down the drain.

Sometimes you have to try six or seven different versions of a flavor combination before you get it right. (Does sassafras syrup go better with bourbon? With rye? With bourbon *and* rye?) Don't be afraid to make mistakes . . . that's how you make brilliant discoveries.

Most bartenders will tell you to add the base spirit last, the idea being that if you mess up, spill, or mismeasure, you won't have ruined your most expensive ingredient. However, when you're working with foraged ingredients, the spirit may no longer be the most precious part of your cocktail. Which is easier to replace, reposado tequila or persimmon purée? Small-batch rye or sassafras syrup? Yes, those spirits may be expensive, but there are some ingredients money can't buy.

Memories of summer camp and northern lakes surrounded by spruce trees and blueberry bushes inspired the name of the Gunwale Jumper.

THE CASCADIAN SOUR

This cocktail includes both Oregon grape and licorice fern, a plant native to and symbolic of the Pacific Northwest. It's a mighty tasty beverage wherever you make it.

Oregon grape is a shrub grown primarily for its ornamental value; most gardeners don't realize the fruit is edible. On their own, Oregon grapes are face-twistingly sour but combined with sugar, they make a balanced, sweet-tart flavoring.

Sour cocktails generally contain a base spirit, citrus juice, and a sweetener. A bit of raw egg white is optional. If you have an aversion to raw egg whites, you can skip that part, but you'll be missing out. The egg whites, when properly shaken, add a silkiness to the drink, creating an emulsion that is slightly thick and very smooth. The bitters are a finishing touch, not only adding another layer of complexity but also keeping the egg whites smelling fresh. (See Using Egg Whites.)

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces rye whiskey
- **1** ounce grape verjuice
- ½ ounce Oregon grape syrup
- **1** tablespoon egg white
- Licorice fern bitters

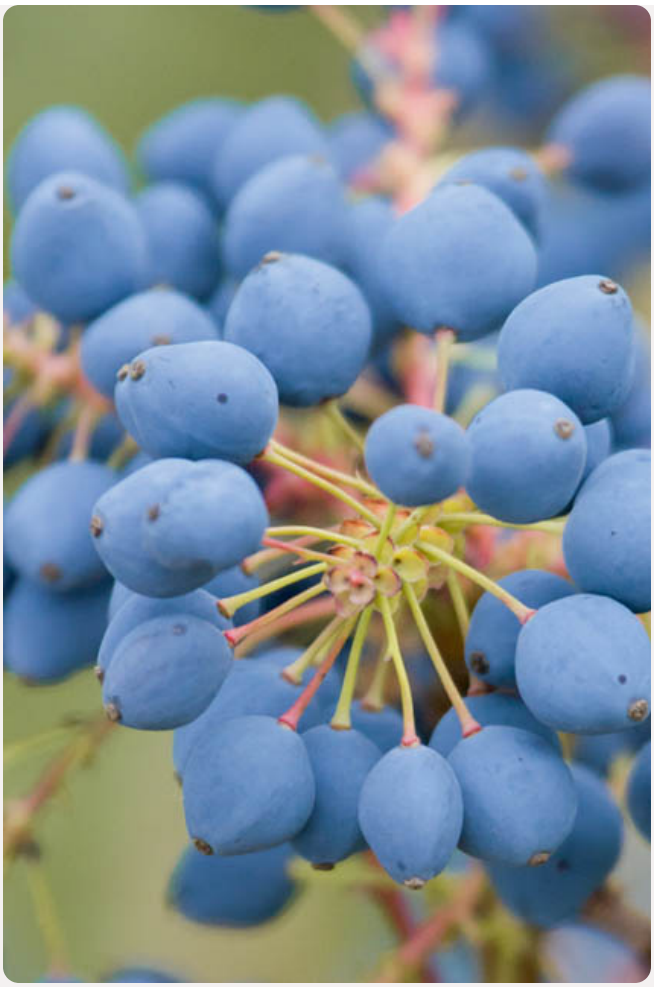
TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the rye, verjuice, Oregon grape syrup, and egg white in a shaker and dry-shake for 30 seconds. Add ice to the shaker and shake again for 30 seconds to thoroughly chill the cocktail. Strain into a rocks glass and top with a few drops of licorice fern bitters for an extra burst of PNW flavor.

PICKING OREGON GRAPE

Oregon grape, also known as mahonia (*Mahonia aquifolium*), is a prickly plant. It doesn't have thorns, but the leaves are sharp and pointy, like holly leaves. And the juice of its dark blue-black berries stains the skin. So wear sturdy gloves when you're harvesting.

Berries ripen from mid- to early summer, depending on where you live. They hang in grapelike clusters (hence the common name), and ripe fruit will stay on the shrubs for several months. With time, the fruit may begin to shrivel. Harvest them before they dry up.



ON THE TRAIL

Foraged mixology is interdisciplinary. In addition to a few tools for gathering ingredients, you need some basic kitchen equipment and at least a few necessities for mixing up your cocktails when you get home. Many foraging tools are also gardening tools, so you probably have a few of these on hand already.

Pruners make it easy to cut branches and thick stems, while regular scissors are adequate for snipping flowers, leaves, and the slender stems of fruit like crab apples.

A special mushroom knife is useful not only for trimming your mushrooms in the field but also for brushing off any dirt that clings to your harvest. If you bag your mushrooms with dirt clinging to the bottom of the stems, that dirt will fall off in transit, bouncing around and making a dirty mess. The more cleaning you do in the field, the easier your work will be back in the kitchen.

Be sure to bring plenty of bags with you when you go foraging, so you can keep your harvests separate and clean. Paper bags are best for mushrooms, which may turn slimy in plastic.

IN THE KITCHEN

In addition to several foraging tools and a well-stocked bar, the foraging mixologist needs a few common kitchen utensils for processing the bounty of the forest and hedgerow.

A FOOD MILL is essential for pulping fruits with medium to large seeds. No one minds eating a blueberry seed, but many wild fruits have seeds that are too hard to chew and too large to swallow easily. A food mill allows you to separate the fruit pulp from the seeds faster and more easily than straining or picking out the seeds by hand. Get a mill with interchangeable plates so

you can choose the one with holes just the right size to catch the seeds but let the pulp pass through.

ABOVE: *Pulping fruit with a food mill*

A SPICE GRINDER is great for crushing or powdering spices. I keep a separate coffee bean grinder for spices. You can use a mortar and pestle for roughly breaking up seeds and spices, but for a fine powder, an electric grinder saves a lot of elbow grease.

A JELLY BAG is an essential tool for juicing. You'll also want a jelly bag stand so you can leave the juice to drip, unattended. The fine mesh of a jelly bag produces a clear, pulp-free juice. You may use cheesecloth instead of a jelly bag, but you'll need

to use multiple layers; line a colander or strainer with three layers of cheesecloth to get the same kind of clarity you would from a jelly bag. Both jelly bags and cheesecloth are washable and reusable, although jelly bags have a longer life span. I also find them easier to use and more convenient to store. Go jelly bags!

A BLENDER comes in handy not only for making purées from foraged fruits but also for crushing ice and making slushies.

A BOILING WATER BATH CANNER is useful if you want to preserve your syrups, pickles, and preserves for long-term storage. You can buy a dedicated boiling water bath canner with a rack to hold jars, or you can use a large pasta pot and place a folded dish towel on the bottom to keep the jars from breaking as they boil.

BEHIND THE BAR

A well-stocked bar isn't critical, but it's fun. Here are a few items that make the mixologist's life that much more pleasant.

A JIGGER OR OTHER MEASURING DEVICE is useful for a properly measured cocktail. Professional mixologists use jiggers smoothly and easily. The most versatile are double sided, with interior markings for interim measurements. For example, one side will hold 1 ounce, with markings for ½ and ¾ ounce. The other side will hold 1½ ounces, with markings for ¾ ounce.

Personally, I prefer a clear plastic 2-ounce measuring vessel with continuous markings at ¼-ounce intervals. It's just easier for me. Maybe if I were a professional mixologist and made hundreds of drinks every night I'd be a master of the jigger, but I'm not. Also, I like a set of teaspoons that includes a ƒ teaspoon measure because sometimes you want just a taste of an ingredient. Jiggers, and measurements in general, are important not only for keeping your proportions correct but also for making your results repeatable (or avoidable).

MUDDLERS come in many shapes and sizes. You may not think you need a muddler, but it really is the best tool for crushing fruits. You can get away with using any number of kitchen tools (the end of a rolling pin, the handle of a wooden spoon), but it's nice to have a dedicated muddler. Muddlers may be smooth ended or toothed and made from wood, plastic, or stainless steel. Don't use anything with paint or varnish; it will eventually come off in the cocktail. My muddler of choice is a smooth-ended wood muddler that looks like a large pestle.

HERBS: SPANK, DON'T MUDDLE

Muddlers shouldn't be used on herbs except with a very light hand. Muddling can tear their leaves and release chlorophyll, which has a bitter taste. Instead, spank your herbs by laying them flat on one palm and smacking them a few times with your other hand. When you smell the essential oils, your herbs have been punished enough and are ready to use.

A SODA SIPHON is a bottle used to carbonate liquid by forcing carbon dioxide into the liquid. You use individual CO_2 cartridges to carbonate each batch of liquid, like sumac-ade and nettle tea. SodaStream is a brand of siphon designed for household use. While the manufacturer expressly tells you not to use SodaStream equipment to carbonate anything other than water (you add their proprietary flavors after carbonation), you can use it to carbonate nonwater beverages safely as long as the liquids you use have not been sweetened. However, doing so will void the manufacturer's warranty and may also cause a messy explosion. Flavored waters, like sumac-ade, are easily overcarbonated in the SodaStream. If you want to experiment, aim for undercarbonation and, trust me, do it outside. You're welcome.

Stirring

Is there anyone who has *not* heard James Bond call for his martini "shaken, not stirred"? I love James as much as the next gal, but he got it wrong when it came to mixology. If a cocktail includes only alcohol-based ingredients (like a classic martini with gin and vermouth), it should be stirred. The gentle motion of stirring allows the drink to be properly chilled without integrating air into the mix. This maintains the silky, smooth feel appropriate for this kind of cocktail.

A dedicated bar spoon may feel like an extravagance, but it isn't, not really. Yes, you can stir a cocktail with a knife or a chopstick, but the long handle of a bar spoon lets you spin the contents of your cocktail glass or shaker with an effortless

twirl. And since you want to stir for at least 30 seconds, effortless is good.

Shaking

Cocktails that include juices, fruit, eggs, or cream need to be shaken to fully integrate all these ingredients with the alcohol. The result is frothy, creamy, and aerated. A "dry shake" is a preliminary shaking, with no ice; it's used for egg-based drinks and allows for frothing and emulsification. It is usually followed by a regular shake, with ice. There are two kinds of shakers.

A COBBLER SHAKER is all metal and has three pieces: a large metal bottom tin, a smaller top with a built-in strainer, and a cap. This is my preferred shaker for several reasons: 1) I like the convenience of the built-in strainer; 2) it's faster and easier to pour from; 3) it weighs less and so is less tiring to shake; and 4) it's small enough that I can hold it and shake it in one hand.

A BOSTON SHAKER is composed of a pint glass and a shaking tin. Some people like it because you can see what's inside the pint glass. Others don't because of the uneven weight of the two pieces and the breakability of the pint glass. There are all-metal versions of the Boston shaker, although they are less common. The Boston shaker is the choice of most professional bartenders. If you go with a Boston shaker, you'll need a separate strainer.

A JULEP STRAINER is usually used for straining stirred drinks. Its small round holes allow liquids to pass through without overaerating them.

A HAWTHORNE STRAINER is primarily used for straining shaken drinks. A spring holds the strainer in place inside the tin when you're pouring the drink. How firmly you press the spring against the rim of the tin controls how quickly you pour the cocktail (you want to pour fast to maintain the aeration) and how finely you strain. When the spring is held just barely touching the rim of the tin, the strainer holes are wide open and the cocktail pours quickly. When the spring is pushed hard against the rim of the tin, the openings in the strainer are reduced, which slows the flow of the cocktail and catches more chunks of ice and fruit.

MESH STRAINERS are useful for finely straining a cocktail and for making various juices, syrups, and infusions. I often strain liqueurs through a fine yogurt strainer to make sure they're crystal clear.

TOOLS FOR SHAKEN DRINKS

Ice Matters

Shaking or stirring your cocktail with ice and then straining it off the ice allows you to chill your beverage without overdiluting it. This is extremely important in maintaining the balance of a mixed drink, especially one you've taken great

care to create. And let's face it, nobody makes a foraged cocktail casually. This kind of mixology takes commitment. If you do use ice in the serving glass, or if you make a frozen blended drink with ice, make this choice thoughtfully.

For frozen drinks (e.g., Frozen Persimmon Margarita), factor the extra water into the recipe so the flavorful ingredients aren't overwhelmed and weakened. If you want to serve a spirit-forward cocktail on the rocks, use one large ice cube rather than several smaller cubes. A single large cube will melt more slowly, maintaining the integrity of your ingredient balance. And never underestimate the importance of clear ice. Cloudy ice not only takes away from the beauty of your beverage but also may have picked up stray flavors in the freezer. Boiling your ice cube water and making ice in closed containers guarantees clear, pure cubes.

Don't Forget the Glassware

There are so many different kinds of glasses out there: beautiful shapes, various sizes and materials. Sometimes your glassware choice is an integral part of the cocktail and sometimes it's just a matter of personal taste. I find myself reaching for a classic champagne coupe more often than anything else. I like the way it looks and it's the right size for a spirit-forward cocktail (my beverage of choice). If you tend to like cocktails with a healthy dose of nonalcoholic mixer, you may find a highball glass to be your best friend.

Martini glasses are for martinis, margarita glasses are for margaritas, and a champagne flute shows off the bubbles in

sparkling wine. But in most cases you can use whichever glass you have on hand or like the best. I wouldn't turn down a Sumac Spritzer just because you served it to me in a rocks glass. Here are some of the most useful glass types. I like to pick them up at flea markets and secondhand stores; they can usually be had for about a dollar apiece.

ABOVE: **Martini glasses** *are used for Manhattans, martinis, and other cocktails that are served straight up rather than on the rocks.*

Rocks glasses *come in single and double sizes. The double rocks glass is also known as an old-fashioned glass. Rocks glasses are used to serve cocktails on the rocks.*

A highball glass *is the same as a collins glass and is used for a wide variety of shaken or stirred cocktails.*

ABOVE: **The champagne flute** *is great for any cocktail containing sparkling wine.*

The classic champagne coupe *(or coupette) can be used for much more than champagne. It holds 5 to 6 ounces of liquid and is generally used for drinks served straight up, not over ice.*

CHAPTER TWO

Garnish that Glass with a Weed

I don’t have much patience for garnishes that just look good. I demand more from them than mere beauty; they should also add flavor or texture to a drink. That doesn’t mean I don’t occasionally succumb to the allure of a vivid green slice of lime (especially against the background of a brightly hued cocktail like the pink Prickly Caipirinha), but I don’t use it for looks alone. That would be shallow.

Garnishes can be sour, sweet, or savory, and they come in many different forms. You can, for example, replace the pickled onion or olive in a traditional martini with a pickled daylily bud or float a pickled crab apple in a glass of bourbon. Muddle a few black raspberries in the bottom of your gin glass for deep purple color (see Happy Birthday, Leda), or make some foraged fruit leather and use it as a slowly dissolving edible swizzle stick.

Foraged Pickles

Using pickles is an easy way to add wild flavor to your favorite adult beverage. Refrigerator pickles (sometimes called quick pickles) will keep in the refrigerator for a few weeks. If you're interested in longer-term storage, you'll need to process your pickles in a boiling water bath. The extra heat of the boiling water bath may soften your pickles, so choose something sturdy that can stand up to the processing. Fiddlehead ferns, field garlic bulbs, and crab apples are good candidates for canned pickles, while daylily buds and knotweed shoots are better used in quick pickles.

Leave Enough Headspace

Various canning recipes call for different amounts of headspace to allow for the expansion of the food while it is heating and for the formation of a solid vacuum seal as the jars

cool. Jams and jellies usually specify ¼ inch, pickles require ½ inch, and low-acid, pressure-canned foods usually need 1 inch. Refrigerator pickles don't require headspace since they aren't being canned, but be sure you have enough brine to fully cover your pickles, so they won't become discolored from exposure to the air.

A WORD ABOUT KOSHER SALT

Regular table salt usually contains anticaking agents and iodine, which can turn pickle brines cloudy or dark. Kosher salt is usually pure (check the label to be sure) and delivers a better brine.

QUICK PICKLED DAYLILY BUDS

Makes 3 half-pint jars

Before I make a pickle brine, I try to imagine what the finished product will taste like. You've heard the expression "the mind's eye"? When I'm inventing recipes, I use my "mind's palate." All brines have certain things in common (like water and vinegar), but your spices will change depending on what it is you're pickling. The brine for these daylily buds is one of my favorites. It's a little spicy, a little sweet, and a lot delicious.

INGREDIENTS

- **3** cups daylily buds

BRINE

- **1½** cups water
- **1½** cups white wine vinegar
- **½** cup sugar
- **1½** tablespoons kosher salt
- **½** teaspoon dried wild ginger rhizome
- **½** teaspoon whole, dried spicebush berries
- **½** teaspoon whole, dried pequin chiles

- **1** large Pennsylvania bay leaf (if you have California bay leaves, use half a leaf; the flavor is much stronger)

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine all the brine ingredients in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and let the brine simmer for 2 to 3 minutes, whisking to dissolve the sugar and salt. Pour the hot brine over the daylily buds and let steep for several hours. You can eat your quick pickles right away, but the flavor will develop with time, and they'll be even tastier after sitting in the brine for a few days.

Store, covered, in the refrigerator,
where they'll keep for several weeks.

PICKING DAYLILIES

It's not unusual to find great expanses of daylilies (*Hemerocallis fulva*) in fields near abandoned homesteads or along country roads. Daylilies produce lots of flowers and they also tend to grow in large clumps. You should be able to harvest several cups of buds and still leave plenty behind to look beautiful in bloom. For pickling, choose buds that are about 2 inches long and fully green, or with just a flush of orange.

THE DIRTY LILY BUD

Franklin Roosevelt is associated with the creation of the dirty martini, in two equally unsubstantiated stories. The first has Joseph Stalin suggesting vodka and pickle juice as a hangover cure at Yalta. (Apparently that's a classic Russian morning-after cure.) There being no vodka on the breakfast table (what?!), Winston Churchill volunteered a bottle of gin and a jar of olives and voilà: the birth of the dirty martini. The second account is less dramatic and merely mentions that FDR, an avid home mixologist, liked to add both olives and a bit of their brine to his gin martinis.

Whether these stories are true or not, we certainly have FDR to thank for the repeal of Prohibition, so he's aces in my book, even though I'm pretty sure he wasn't a forager. Still, I'll toast to FDR and the repeal of Prohibition with a Dirty Lily Bud, which is what you get when you replace the dirty martini's classic olive garnish and juice with a pickled daylily bud and a bit of its brine.

The addition of pickle brine adds extra flavor and spice to this classic cocktail, and it also lets you take the alcohol content down a notch. Without the brine the liquid ingredients in a martini are entirely alcoholic.

INGREDIENTS

- **2 ½** ounces gin
- **½** ounce dry vermouth
- **¼** ounce pickled daylily brine (or more, to taste)
- Quick Pickled Daylily Buds, for garnish

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

In a mixing glass or shaker full of ice, combine the gin, vermouth, and brine and stir (don't shake, despite what James Bond says) for 30 seconds. Strain into a chilled martini glass and garnish with as many pickled daylily buds as you see fit.

Feel free to adjust the amount of brine according to your personal taste. Likewise, if you have a different foraged pickle you prefer (pickled field garlic, pickled milkweed flowers, pickled purslane), feel free to substitute. But you'll have to come up with your own name for any variations on this delicious foraged drink.

QUICK PICKLED JAPANESE KNOTWEED STEMS

Makes 3 (4-ounce) jars

Japanese knotweed is generally despised by gardeners and environmentalists. It's an aggressive plant, spreading rapidly by both seed and underground runners, and it's very difficult to get rid of. Foragers, on the other hand, celebrate the appearance of Japanese knotweed shoots in spring. The young shoots make a crunchy, tart pickle with a strong lemony taste. Knotweed loses its pretty green and red colors once it's pickled, but it retains its crunch and the tart flavor is exceptional.

INGREDIENTS

- **1 ½** cups Japanese knotweed stems, stripped of their leaves, washed, and sliced into ½ - to ¾ -inch-long lengths
- **3** cloves garlic
- **9** small hot chiles
- **6** (1-inch) pieces dried wild ginger rhizome

BRINE

- **1** cup apple cider vinegar

- **1** cup water
- **2** tablespoons sugar
- **1** tablespoon kosher salt

INSTRUCTIONS

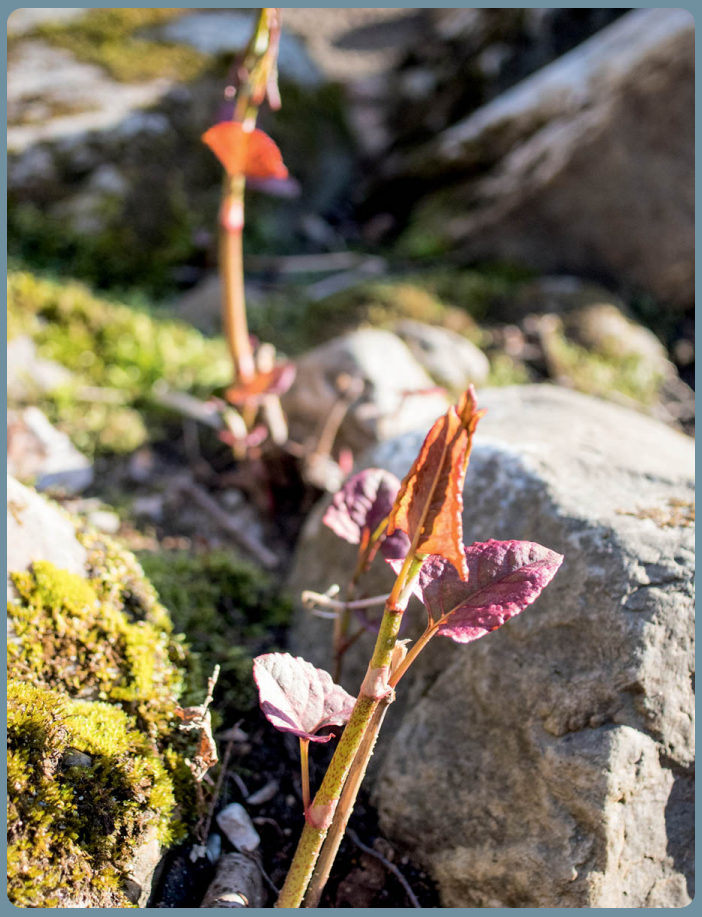
Combine all the brine ingredients in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and let the brine simmer for 2 to 3 minutes, whisking to dissolve the sugar and salt. Remove from the heat and let cool to room temperature. (Japanese knotweed turns mushy when heated, so this pickle is best made with a cooled brine.)

Set out three sterilized 4-ounce jars. Into each one put **½** cup sliced Japanese knotweed, one garlic clove, three chiles, and two pieces of dried wild ginger rhizome. Pour in enough brine to cover each jar's contents, seal the jars, and refrigerate.

You may eat your knotweed pickles after a few hours, but the flavor will be better after 24 to 48 hours. These pickles will keep for several weeks in the refrigerator.

PICKING JAPANESE KNOTWEED

Harvest Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) when the stalks are tender and easy to snap by hand. You may have read that only the very short, young stalks of knotweed are suitable for eating, but this isn't true. As long as you can easily snap off the top of the stem (the last 12 inches or so), you're good to go. The stem should make a satisfying pop as it breaks off. If it's too tough to snap by hand, move up the stem until you find a spot tender enough to break.



GET OFF MY LAWN

When you can use weeds in your cocktails, it's a win-win. You eradicate a few pesky plants and you get a delicious adult beverage. Most people don't realize that the purslane they pull out of their garden beds is the same purslane you'll see at the grocery store or farmers' market for $6.95 a pound.

Purslane is chock-full of omega-3 essential fatty acids, making it a very healthy weed indeed. But who's kidding whom? That's not why you're making this drink. Purslane has a lemony, peppery flavor and gives this drink a gorgeous green color. In its prime it's a succulent plant; that's when you want to harvest it for this cocktail. Once the plant has flowered and set seed, it's usually not juicy enough to flavor the drink. Don't give in to the temptation to pick purslane from city sidewalks, where dogs and pollution may sully your harvest. The last six to eight inches of stem are most succulent and work best in this cocktail.

And because I can't resist playing with plants, I've added two more wild edibles to this recipe. A Japanese knotweed pickle takes the lemony flavor up a notch and adds a little heat. A salt rim made with pink peppercorns adds complexity and spiciness.

I prefer my margaritas straight up, but you may serve yours on the rocks if you prefer. And before you say anything, yes, it's a generous drink. You got a problem with that?

INGREDIENTS

- Fresh lemon juice, for the rim
- Salt and pink peppercorn blend, for the rim
- **3** ounces reposado tequila
- ½ cup juicy, fresh purslane
- **1** ounce Cointreau
- ½ ounce verjuice
- Quick Pickled Japanese Knotweed Stems, for garnish

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Rim a margarita glass first in lemon juice and then in the salt and pink peppercorn blend and set aside. Combine the tequila and purslane in a blender and pulverize until the purslane is thoroughly liquefied. Strain the green liquid through a jelly bag. Transfer the strained liquid to a shaker filled with ice and add the Cointreau and verjuice. Shake for 30 seconds, then strain into the rimmed margarita glass and garnish with a Japanese knotweed pickle or two.

Note: The color of the purslane tequila fades with time, so use it quickly.

PICKLED FIDDLEHEAD FERNS

Makes 2 (4-ounce) jars

Remember when I said a garnish had to do more than just look good? Of all the foraged pickles you might use in a cocktail, a pickled fiddlehead fern is probably the most beautiful. Plus, it has a nice crunch and fresh flavor. Use it to garnish a Gunwale Jumper. The brine is extremely simple so as not to obscure the delicate flavor of the fiddlehead.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** cup fern fiddleheads

BRINE

- **1** cup white wine vinegar
- **1** cup water
- **½** cup sugar
- **1** tablespoon kosher salt
- **½** teaspoon whole pink peppercorns

INSTRUCTIONS

Wash your fiddleheads to remove any remnants of their brown, papery sheaths and trim the ends. Bring a pot of water to a boil. If you're planning to make this recipe as a quick refrigerator pickle, add the fiddleheads to the boiling water and cook for 10 minutes. If you're planning to can your pickles, blanch the fiddleheads in the boiling water for 60 seconds and then plunge them into ice water to stop the cooking. When the fiddleheads have cooled, strain them and divide them between two sterilized 4-ounce canning jars.

Combine all the brine ingredients in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and let simmer for 2 to 3 minutes, whisking to dissolve the sugar and salt. Pour the brine over the fiddleheads.

If you're making quick refrigerator pickles, let the jars cool, then cover and store in the refrigerator, where the pickles will keep for 2 to 4 weeks. If you're canning the pickles, add just enough brine to leave ½ inch of headspace, and process the jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes.

PICKING FIDDLEHEADS

While all fern fronds start out as fiddleheads, not all ferns are delicious, and there's debate over the toxicity of some species. Ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*, *M. pennsylvanica*) in the east and lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*) in the west are the tastiest. Most people have no problem eating raw fiddleheads, but they may cause gastrointestinal problems for some. Cooking fiddleheads for 10 minutes eliminates the possibility of gastrointestinal upset.

Because fiddleheads are not weeds or aggressive growers, please harvest with restraint. Pick them when they are still tightly furled and harvest only two or three fronds from each plant, leaving plenty behind to unfurl and photosynthesize.

THE GUNWALE JUMPER

If you grew up going to a summer camp with a lake, chances are you spent some time in a canoe. You may have learned to paddle, you may have learned how to right a swamped canoe, and if you were very, very lucky, you may have learned how to gunwale jump. It's only a little easier than it looks.

Gunwale jumping involves standing with one foot on each gunwale, in the back quarter of the canoe. Keeping your feet on the gunwales (you don't really jump), you repeatedly and forcefully pump your legs up and down to propel the canoe forward. It's what you do when you're up a creek without a paddle. And it's really fun.

The ingredients in this drink are all things you might find in the bottom of your canoe after a paddle, except for the whisky. Unless you went to a very different kind of summer camp.

Wild blueberries are flavorful but tart; the sweetness of the acorn orgeat balances the sour fruit. Maple syrup would also be a nice sweetener here and fully in keeping with the theme of the cocktail.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces Canadian whisky
- **1** tablespoon wild blueberries
- **2** teaspoons acorn orgeat
- ½ teaspoon spruce tip vodka
- **1** Pickled Fiddlehead Fern, for garnish

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the whisky and blueberries in a shaker and muddle the blueberries. Add the orgeat and vodka and fill the shaker with ice. Shake for 30 seconds, then strain into a glass. Garnish with a pickled fiddlehead.

PICKLED FIELD GARLIC BULBS

Makes 4 (4-ounce) jars

A Gibson is traditionally garnished with a pickled onion, but pickled field garlic substitutes a pop of robust foraged flavor. The flavor of field garlic is halfway between that of onion and garlic, and the small, sturdy bulb stands up well to the heat of a boiling water bath. This means you can make a big batch of pickled field garlic in spring and snack on it all year long.

Because the flavor of the bulbs themselves is so strong, I keep the brine simple. The pickles not only are great in Gibsons but make an excellent accompaniment to cheese or caviar.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** cups field garlic bulbs
- **16** whole, dried juniper berries
- **½** teaspoon dried wild ginger rhizomes

BRINE

- **1** cup water
- **½** cup white wine vinegar
- **¼** cup sugar

- ¾ tablespoon kosher salt

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine all the brine ingredients in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and let the brine simmer for 2 to 3 minutes, whisking to dissolve the sugar and salt.

Divide the garlic bulbs evenly among four sterilized 4-ounce canning jars. To each jar add four juniper berries and ⅛ teaspoon wild ginger rhizomes. Pour the brine into the jars, leaving ½ inch of headspace, and screw the canning lids in place. Process in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes.

Wait 2 weeks before tasting these pickles to let the flavors develop fully.

Canned field garlic pickles will last for a year on the shelf.

PICKING FIELD GARLIC

Field garlic (*Allium vineale*) is a spring crop; harvest the bulbs when the first green, grasslike leaves begin to show. Hold the leaves just where they emerge from the soil and pull straight up. Bulbs range in size from c to b inch in diameter, and they bring a lot of dirt up with them. Wash the bulbs, then trim off the roots and stems, leaving about an inch of neck at the top of the bulb.

PICKLED CRAB APPLES

Makes 2 pints

Most people don't think of fruit as pickles, but crab apples work beautifully with a spicy brine. Larger fruits (more than 1 inch in diameter) make better pickles, because their texture is usually crisper than that of smaller crab apples, which tend to be mealy. Use them as a garnish for a Kentucky Belle.

INGREDIENTS

- **4** cups of crab apples

BRINE

- **2** teaspoons whole, dried spicebush berries
- **2** teaspoons dried wild ginger rhizomes
- **2 1/4** cups apple cider vinegar
- **1 3/4** cups water
- **3 1/4** cups sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Wash the crab apples, leaving the individual stems in place. Prick each crab apple with a toothpick or skewer in two or three

places, to prevent the skins from cracking when the fruit is heated.

Place the spicebush berries and ginger rhizomes in a tea ball. Combine the vinegar, water, and sugar in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, whisking to dissolve the sugar. Reduce the heat to a simmer, add the tea ball with the spices, and let the brine simmer for 5 minutes. Remove the brine from the heat.

When the brine is cool, add the crab apples and gradually heat the mixture to just below a boil. Keep here, just below a boil, for 5 minutes; if you notice the skins cracking, reduce the heat. Then remove the pan from the heat and transfer the contents (including the tea ball) to a bowl. Cover the bowl and let it sit at room temperature overnight.

Remove the tea ball. Divide the crab apples between two sterilized pint jars. Top with the brine, leaving ½ inch of headspace. Process the jars in a boiling water bath for 25 minutes. These pickles will keep for up to a year.

PICKING CRAB APPLES

Crab apples (*Malus* spp.) generally have a diameter of less than 2 inches. They are abundant in many parts of the country in late summer and fall, and their tart taste combines wonderfully with the warm, sweet flavor of bourbon. Crab apples may be red, yellow, or orange. They're ripe and fully flavored when no longer green. You can use any crab apples you like for pickling — just make sure they haven't been sprayed with pesticides.

THE KENTUCKY BELLE

You can make this cocktail with wild ginger syrup and seltzer or with double-strength ginger ale. To make double-strength ginger ale, use twice as much syrup as recommended in a home carbonation system like SodaStream.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces crab apple–infused bourbon
- **1** teaspoon wild ginger syrup
- **2** ounces seltzer
- Pickled crab apple, for garnish (optional)

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the bourbon and ginger syrup in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a champagne coupe and top with the seltzer. Garnish with a pickled crab apple if desired.

If you're using double-strength ginger ale, don't shake this cocktail! Stir the bourbon with ice, then strain into a coupe and top with 2 ounces of double-strength ginger ale.

Foraged Fruit for Flavor

Wild fruits are delicious in many different forms. In cocktails I use them pickled, as juices, muddled, and also as purées, syrups, and jellies/jams. In each case, the foraged fruit adds both beauty and flavor to the drink.

JUICES

Both soft and hard fruits can be juiced to create strongly flavored wild cocktail ingredients. The process for both types of fruit is the same. Place your fruit in a skillet and barely cover with water. Bring the fruit and water to a boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer and cook until the fruit is soft enough to mash with a potato masher.

Pour the mashed fruit into a jelly bag and let the juice drip through. Resist the temptation to squeeze the jelly bag; let gravity do the work. Squeezing may create a cloudy juice and make your cocktail less beautiful and jewel-like.

I'm especially fond of how fresh, wild juices combine with pisco, a grape-based brandy native to Peru and Chile. Both countries have strong wine-making traditions, and both claim pisco as their national drink. I'm not going to get involved in international debate, but I do recommend this brandy as a versatile base spirit for cocktail creation. The more I use it, the more I like it.

WHAT IS PISCO?

Pisco is a clear, clean grape brandy made in both Peru and Chile. Peruvian pisco must be aged for at least 3 months in containers that don't alter the brandy's physical or chemical properties. This means no cask aging, since wood imparts so much flavor. Chilean pisco is aged in wood, which not only adds flavor but also often produces a darker pisco.

The pisco sour is probably the best known pisco cocktail. Traditionally it contains pisco, citrus, syrup, and, depending on where you drink it, maybe egg whites and bitters or maybe not.

ABOVE: *Juicing with a jelly bag*

PINEAPPLE GUAVA PISCO PUNCH

The fruit of pineapple guava is often ignored. It falls to the ground when ripe and most people let it lie there, never realizing how tasty it is. Why is all this fruit wasted? Because it's green? Because it's not pretty? Whatever the reason, it's a crying shame. The flavor of pineapple guava is lightly sweet and almost herbal. It tastes nothing like pineapple and nothing like guava.

It wasn't just the alliteration that made me think pineapple guava would go well with pisco. The original pisco punch was created in San Francisco and I first foraged for pineapple guava in the Bay Area. Traditional pisco punch is made with pineapple gum syrup, whose thickness gives the cocktail a thick, silky mouthfeel. Pineapple guava juice is naturally thick and silky. See where I'm going with this?

Once I had the two base flavors (the spirit and the fruit), I added quince liqueur for more sweetness and floral depth, fino sherry for a hint of acidity, and spruce tip vodka for a touch of freshness that lifts and ties together the heavier flavors without taking center stage. You may substitute Clear Creek Distillery's Douglas Fir Eau de Vie for the homemade spruce tip vodka. It's a lovely spirit, albeit not inexpensive.

INGREDIENTS

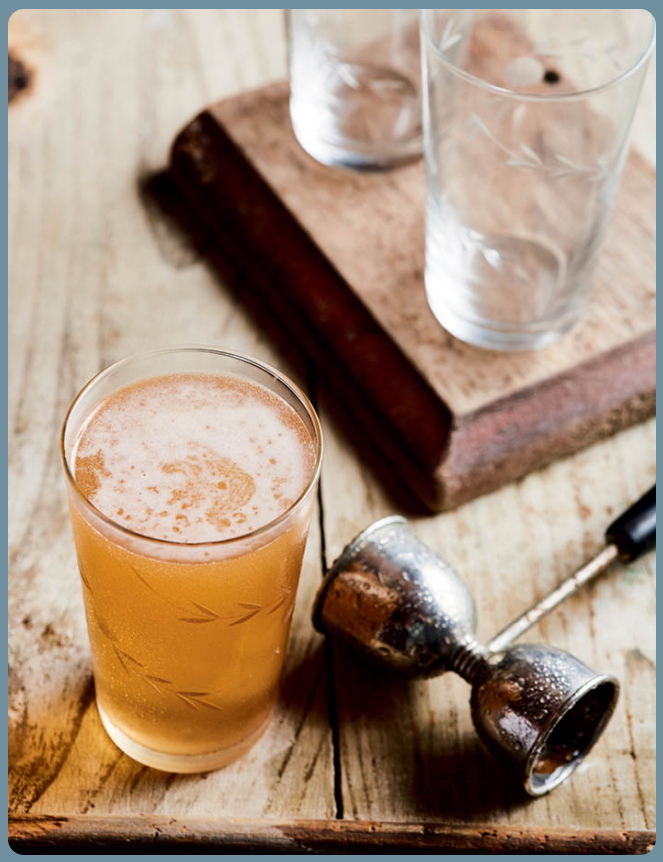
- **2** ounces pisco
- **3** ounces pineapple guava juice
- ½ ounce flowering quince liqueur
- ½ ounce fino sherry
- ½ teaspoon spruce tip vodka
- **2** ounces seltzer

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the pisco, pineapple guava juice, quince liqueur, sherry, and vodka in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain the cocktail into a highball glass and top with seltzer. Alternatively, you can transfer the contents to a plastic container, stir in the seltzer, and move it to the freezer. The alcohol will keep the mixture from freezing solid, but within about an hour it will solidify enough to make a terrific slushy.

PICKING PINEAPPLE GUAVA

Pineapple guavas (*Acca sellowiana*) are a popular landscape plant in zones 8 and warmer, but the fruit is often ignored. It ripens in fall and should only be harvested after it has fallen to the ground; fruit still attached to the shrub isn't quite ripe. Cut the fruit in half and scoop out the flesh. If you're going to use the pulp, run it through a food mill to remove the seeds. If you're going to use the juice, follow the instructions for juicing fruits.



ODE TO THE GRAPE

While there are some truly wild grapes, most grapes you'll forage for are actually feral. That means they have escaped cultivation. This is a technicality, and one that makes very little difference to me. But I wanted you to know.

For this recipe you want a strong grape flavor, like that of Concord grapes. The cocktail is also more attractive when made with purple grapes. In fact, it's downright gorgeous. Follow the directions for juicing fruits, but don't use your juice right away. There's an extra step for making grape juice.

I named this cocktail Ode to the Grape because it contains three forms of grape: grape brandy, grape juice, and sugared grapes. It's a tribute, dammit.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** tablespoon egg white, plus extra for dipping
- **3** ripe grapes
- Sugar
- **2** ounces pisco
- **2** ounces purple Concord grape juice

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Collect a bit of egg white in a small bowl. Dip each grape in the egg white, roll in sugar, and set aside to let the sugar coating dry.

Combine the pisco, grape juice, and 1 tablespoon egg whites in a shaker and dry-shake for 30 seconds. Add ice and shake again for 30 seconds to thoroughly chill the cocktail. Strain into a glass and garnish with the sugared grapes.

A SPECIAL STEP FOR GRAPE JUICE

Grapes are high in tartaric acid, from which cream of tartar is made. Crystals of tartaric acid can settle out of homemade grape juice. The crystals aren't harmful, but it's a little disconcerting to take a sip of grape juice and crunch down on a mouthful of small crystals.

Fortunately, the crystals precipitate out of solution if you refrigerate the grape juice for 48 hours. You'll notice a visible layer of sludge in the bottom of the grape juice jar. Strain the juice through a coffee filter or two layers of cheesecloth to remove the crystals.

MUDDLING

The best fruits for muddling are small, soft fruits like wineberries, Juneberries, and grapes. A gentle muddling lets you extract the juices while leaving bits and pieces of the fruit intact. This is usually the first step in assembling a cocktail and is done in the bottom of the cocktail glass itself. If you've ever used a mortar and pestle, the technique for using a muddler will seem familiar. Place the fruit in the glass and give a few gentle turns of the muddler. Muddled fruit usually sits at the bottom of a cocktail, infusing the liquid and looking beautiful. At the end, you swallow it down in one boozy, fruity gulp.

ABOVE: *Muddling soft fruit*

Soft Fruit Purées

If you were to take muddling one step further, you'd end up with a purée. Fruit purées add color, flavor, and texture to a cocktail, and depending on the consistency of the fruit, there

are several ways to make them. Most juicy fruits can be puréed without the addition of liquid, while others may need a little extra water or juice to create the right consistency. You'll need a food mill or a wire mesh strainer.

If you have a food mill, choose the plate with holes just big enough to catch the seeds, then run the fruit through the mill. If you're using a strainer, push the fruit through the wire mesh to separate the seeds from the fruit.

Why use a purée instead of juice? Juice gives you a clear cocktail, with color and flavor. A purée delivers a completely different mouthfeel; it has texture, opacity, and heft. Both are useful in different situations, and both should be used in shaken cocktails or blended drinks, where athletic arm action fully integrates the fruit and the alcohol.

You could leave the skins of American persimmons, pineapple guavas, and pawpaws on the fruit, but I don't recommend it. They're soft enough to run through a food mill raw, but the skins are generally not considered tasty and should be removed before you mill the pulp. If the milled fruit looks and feels lumpy, transfer it to a blender and process until it's a smooth and appetizing purée.

SUGAR BEAR

If a person had a still way down yonder in the pawpaw patch, this is what they might be making. Anyone who has tasted the elusive pawpaw knows that the fruit tastes like crème brûlée right off the tree. It's sweet and custardy and no one would judge you if you stood in the middle of the pawpaw patch and ate the fruit by the bucketful.

The flavor of pawpaw fruit is quite delicate, and alcohol can easily overwhelm it. Since I use bourbon in my pawpaw crème brûlée recipe, I thought it would be a good base spirit for a pawpaw cocktail. I began testing with equal parts bourbon and pawpaw, but the flavor of the fruit was almost entirely lost. To preserve the pawpaw integrity of the cocktail, I backed off the bourbon, keeping the volume of alcohol low.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces bourbon
- **4** ounces pawpaw purée
- ½ ounce acorn orgeat
- ½ teaspoon verjuice
- Ground dried spicebush berries (optional)

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the bourbon, pawpaw purée, acorn orgeat, and verjuice in a shaker with ice and shake for 30 seconds. Pause, then shake again for 30 seconds. Pawpaw purée is thick and extra shaking is required to mix it up. Even so, this will be a thick drink. A sprinkling of ground spicebush berries is a tasty and attractive garnish.

PICKING PAWPAWS

The pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) is the largest edible fruit native to the United States. It's found in large parts of the central and eastern United States, but the fruit isn't easy to come by.

First of all, pawpaws need to be dead ripe to be delicious. That means soft, squishy, and not well suited to shipping long distances. You may find them at local farmers' markets or pawpaw festivals (yes, there are pawpaw festivals), but don't count on it. People don't like to part with their hard-earned pawpaws.

In the wild you'll often find pawpaw trees but no fruit. That's because pawpaw flowers can't self-pollinate and must have other trees nearby for insect pollination. Commercial growers hand-pollinate their trees.

FORAGED FRUIT LEATHER

Makes 20–30 strips of fruit leather

Fruit leather has long been a treat for school lunches and afternoon snacks, but I'm here to tell you it's not just for kids anymore. Fruit leather is a great way to preserve the flavor of fruit, and it's a cocktail multitasker. Use it as a swizzle stick, and then, as the fruit leather softens, let it dissolve in your drink or just go ahead and eat it.

You can use this technique to make fruit leather from any foraged fruit. I like a combination of Juneberries and mulberries, which conveniently (and tastily) both ripen in late spring/early summer. Fruits with larger seeds, like silverberries, elderberries, and prickly pear, should be run through a food mill to remove the seeds before being turned into fruit leather.

INGREDIENTS

- **4** cups ripe fruit
- Water or juice, as needed for consistency
- Sugar, spice, or verjuice, as needed for flavoring

INSTRUCTIONS

Put the fruit in a blender and blend on high speed until liquefied. The consistency should be thick but pourable, similar to that of smooth applesauce. If your fruit purée is too thick, add a little water or fruit juice. Apple and white grape have the most neutral flavors.

Taste your purée and add sugar if needed, but remember, this is a cocktail garnish, not a dessert. Perhaps, rather than adding sweetness, you might add a foraged spice or a splash of verjuice for extra tartness.

If you have a dehydrator, spread the purée evenly on the special fruit leather sheets that came with it, making a layer approximately 1/8 inch thick. Dry it at 135°F (55°C). Depending on your climate, the leather may take 6 to 10 hours to dry. It's done when pressure from your finger will not make an indentation.

If you don't have a dehydrator, you can make fruit leather in the oven. Cover a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone mat. Set the oven to bake at its lowest setting (probably about 170°F/75°C) and continue as above. The drying process should be quicker at this slightly higher temperature. When the leather is done, peel it from the dehydrator sheets or parchment paper. Let it cool, then cut it into strips.

Wrap the individual pieces in plastic wrap or parchment paper to store. They'll keep for a month at room temperature and up to a year in the freezer.

THE FORAGED FIX

Guest Mixologist: Kyle Ford

Kyle Ford worked in finance for four years after college, but finding that he needed an outlet for his considerable creative energy, he quit his job and dove into the craft cocktail scene. In addition to being recognized by the United States Bartenders' Guild as a spirits professional, Kyle is certified as a level 1 sommelier by the Court of Master Sommeliers. He has worked at well-known cocktail bars from San Francisco to New York City and founded the Ford Marketing Lab, a social media and brand consultancy, with his wife, Rachel Ford.

Kyle says, "A cocktail is so much more than its ingredients. It's an experience; there's that social element. We need to pay attention to what brings a person back to a place. I would rather put a smile on a face than make them the perfect drink." That being said, his drinks are pretty damn good.

There is some debate over what makes a fix cocktail a fix cocktail. The fix is a little-known cocktail category that started out in the late 1900s as a mix of spirits, lemon juice, water, sugar, and ice. Later recipes often used raspberry or pineapple syrup instead of the sugar and water. A range of spirits can be used, including whiskey, rum, and gin, but the classic brandy fix is probably the most popular.

Kyle describes Metaxa as a funky Greek brandy blended with muscat wine and including botanicals like rose and orange blossom. Fruit is an essential ingredient in a fix cocktail, and while pineapple and raspberry are traditional, Kyle says you can use whatever foraged fruit is in season. Juneberries have a complex flavor with undertones of almond, which works nicely with the Metaxa. If Juneberries aren't in season, you can try raspberries, blueberries, or any other berry that's small, soft, and easy to purée without adding water.

While traditional fix recipes call for fruit syrup, Metaxa is sweet all on its own. To balance the sweetness, I've split the base spirit between Metaxa and vodka and used a fruit purée instead of a sweeter fruit syrup.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** ounce vodka
- ½ ounce Metaxa brandy
- ½ ounce verjuice
- ¼ ounce simple syrup
- **1** tablespoon Juneberry purée
- Juneberry fruit leather, for garnish

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the vodka, Metaxa, verjuice, simple syrup, and puréed Juneberries with ice and shake vigorously. Strain into a rocks glass. Garnish with a strip of Juneberry fruit leather.

Foraged Cocktail Rims

The most common cocktail rim is the classic salt rim of a margarita, but you can add flavorful rims to lots of different drinks. While most people simply dip the rim of the glass into a liquid and then into the salt (or sugar, or whatever), I'd like to suggest a different method. The simple dip just described puts half of the salt (or sugar, or whatever) inside the glass, and that's not good. With every sip, the drink gets a little more salty or sweet, and the balance of the cocktail goes to hell in a handbasket, as my mother used to say. Instead, swirl just the

outside rim of the glass in the liquid and then in the rimming salt. And only rim half the glass. That way drinkers can regulate how much extra flavor they take in with each sip, and the drink itself remains balanced and pure. Let the glass dry a little before pouring your cocktail.

When choosing the liquid for your rim, use a flavor that echoes the flavors of your cocktail. For example, I use lime juice for the Frozen Persimmon Margarita because I use lime juice in the cocktail. Water is a perfectly acceptable choice.

SPICEBUSH SUGAR RIM

This rim is the perfect garnish for a Frozen Persimmon Margarita. Do not grind the ingredients together in the spice grinder. You want the texture to be granular, not super fine. Grind the spicebush berries in advance, then combine with the sugar and salt. I suggest kosher salt here because it has a larger grain than regular table salt. (See Picking Spicebush Berries.)

INGREDIENTS

- **1** tablespoon sugar
- **½** teaspoon kosher salt
- **1** teaspoon ground dried spicebush berries

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the sugar, salt, and ground spicebush berries in a small bowl and mix well. Transfer to a saucer for rimming a glass.

PINK PEPPERCORN SALT RIM

This spicy rim is so much prettier than just plain salt. But because we care about more than just good looks, you can rest assured that the flavor of the pink peppercorns is also exceptional. Use this as the finishing touch for a Get Off My Lawn.

Pink peppercorns are small, very hard, dry fruits, so grind them up in your spice grinder first. You'll need to pulse them several times to break them up.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** tablespoon ground pink peppercorns
- **1** tablespoon kosher salt

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the ground pink peppercorns with the salt and mix well. Transfer to a saucer for rimming a glass.

PICKING PINK PEPPERCORNS

Pink peppercorns aren't true peppercorns; they're the fruit of two trees in the *Schinus* genus: *S. terebinthifolius* (Brazilian pepper) and *S. molle* (Peruvian pepper). Brazilian peppercorn is classified as invasive in several states, where sales of it are banned. Peruvian peppercorn is a graceful and attractive tree and not considered invasive. It grows in California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida.

In addition to being a better behaved landscape plant, Peruvian peppercorns are safer to eat. Some people report allergic reactions to Brazilian peppercorns. Fortunately, the foliage of these two trees look very different and it's easy to tell them apart.

FROZEN PERSIMMON MARGARITA

You may recognize the persimmon as the bright orange fruit that graces high-end grocery stores in autumn. These are Asian persimmons and there's nothing wrong with them, but the American persimmon is a rarer and more desirable fruit. It's rare because it isn't often raised as a commercial crop, although some growers sell the frozen pulp. The very nature of the ripe fruit — soft and mushy — makes picking and shipping American persimmons almost impossible, but the rich sweet flavor, with its caramel overtones, is worth hunting for.

INGREDIENTS

- Lime juice
- Spicebush sugar rim
- **2** ounces smooth persimmon purée
- **1½** ounces reposado tequila
- **½** ounce Cointreau
- **½** ounce fresh lime juice
- **1** tablespoon simple syrup
- **1** cup ice cubes
- **1** lime wedge, for garnish

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Rim half of a chilled glass first in lime juice and then the sugar and spicebush blend.

Combine the persimmon purée, tequila, Cointreau, lime juice, simple syrup, and ice cubes in a blender. Blend until the texture is thick and smooth. Pour into the rimmed glass and garnish with a wedge of lime.

PICKING PERSIMMONS

Persimmons (*Diospyros virginiana*) grow primarily from the East Coast to the Mississippi, and from North Carolina to New Hampshire. They are most abundant in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, and Kentucky. You may hear that persimmons require a frost to ripen, but this isn't true. They have a long growing season and often aren't ripe until after the first frost. Start looking for them in September.

If you have to pick a persimmon from the tree, it isn't ready; the fruit will fall off the tree when it's ripe. An unripe persimmon may be pretty and bright orange, but the flavor is an astringent shock you will not soon forget. The fruit is only delicious when it looks awful and is mushy enough to almost fall apart in your hand.

Persimmons don't ripen all at once, so you may want to revisit your trees every few days to gather the fruit.

CHAPTER THREE

Foraged Syrups: Sweet and Wild

Syrups are a great way to preserve the color and flavor of your wild harvest. They're easy to make and they store well as canned goods or in the refrigerator. They also simplify cocktail making by transforming wild plants into a readily usable form: it's much easier to make a big batch of cornelian cherry syrup and use it as a wild grenadine than it is to individually deseed and muddle a few cornelian cherries for a single cocktail. Additionally, many wild fruits are intensely sour and require sweetening to be palatable. Preserving them in syrup form adds the necessary sweetener while streamlining the cocktail-making process.

You can make a syrup from any plant part: flowers, leaves, fruits, nuts, stems, twigs, or roots. And even though mushrooms aren't technically plants, you can make a tasty syrup from them, too. The processing method differs depending on the plant part. As you might imagine, tough stems and roots require heavier cooking than delicate fruits and flowers.

Syrups can be made from either fresh or dried plant parts. Drying spices concentrates their flavor, so the general rule for adjusting recipes from fresh to dried spices is to use one quarter as much dried material as you would fresh.

You can swap out the sugar in these syrup recipes for your sweetener of choice, but remember that alternative sweeteners may bring their own flavors into the mix. Maple syrup and honey are delicious, but both will change the overall flavor of whatever syrup you use them in.

Flower Syrups

The delicate tissues of most flowers are well suited to making an infusion, which is essentially a tea: you steep the plant material in hot water to extract its flavor. It's possible to eke out even more flavor by infusing the sugar with the flower prior to making the syrup. Covering the flowers in sugar in a closed container allows the sugar to absorb the flavor and scent of the flowers more deeply than quickly infusing the flowers in liquid.

Here I give a recipe for milkweed flower syrup, but you can use this basic recipe for any edible flower — try it with pineapple weed, elderflowers, or lavender. If you want to work with lilac blossoms, use the same technique but make a rich syrup instead. The extra-thick silkiness of a rich syrup brings out the full flavor of the lilac blossoms.

It's possible to eke out even more flavor by infusing the sugar with the flower prior to making the syrup.

Ball

MILKWEED FLOWER SYRUP

Makes 2–2 1/2 cups

The nectar of common milkweed flowers is thick and sweet, with a unique flavor. It's difficult to describe a new flavor in terms of familiar flavors, so I suggest you taste the nectar straight off the plant to see if you like it. When the flowers are ripe, each individual bloom exudes a large, glossy drop of nectar. Dab that with your finger and have a taste. It's floral (of course), rich, and a little spicy, but not in a hot-spicy way.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** cups milkweed flowers
- **1½** cups sugar
- **1½** cups water

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the milkweed flowers and the sugar in a glass or plastic container with a tight lid, stir well, and let sit, covered, for 24 hours.

Transfer the milkweed flowers and sugar to a saucepan and add the water. Whisk over medium heat until the sugar is fully

dissolved and the liquid just begins to simmer. Remove from the heat and cover. Let the syrup sit overnight.

Strain the syrup and pour it into a pretty glass bottle or a canning jar.

The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave ¼ inch headspace.

PICKING MILKWEED

There are many species of milkweed, but only *Asclepias syriaca* (in the east) and *A. speciosa* (in the west) are universally acknowledged as edible. To harvest milkweed flowers, wait until they are fully open and dripping with nectar. It's easy to see when the flowers are ripe. The umbels will be almost fully round and each individual flower will glisten with a drop of sweet nectar. Snip off the whole umbels and shake off any insects. Don't wash the flowers or you'll rinse away the nectar.

A BUTTERFLY KISS

For years common milkweed has been dismissed as a weed rather than appreciated for its many virtues. Few people know that during World War II, the waterproof fibers inside milkweed seed pods were used to fill life vests when the United States no longer had access to the traditional kapok filling imported from the South Pacific. Today those same fibers are used as an effective material to absorb oil spills.

Lepidopterists appreciate milkweed as the essential food source for the caterpillar stage of the monarch butterfly, and foragers eat the young stems, unopened flower buds, and immature seed pods as delicious green vegetables. The fully ripe blossoms of common milkweed make a naturally pink simple syrup that can be used in sorbets, ice cream, jellies, and cocktails.

INGREDIENTS

- **2½** ounces vodka
- **1½** ounces milkweed flower syrup
- **½** ounce seltzer, sparkling water, or club soda

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the vodka and milkweed flower syrup in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a coupe and top with seltzer, sparkling water, or club soda. No garnish required.

Leaf Syrups

Many leaves are similar in texture to flower petals, and these tender plant parts taste best when gently infused in hot water, then combined with sugar into a syrup. However, since leaves are generally appreciated for their savory flavor, use them in a less-sweet light syrup. You can skip the sugar infusion stage; these leaves have strong flavors and don't need the extra infusion time. This basic recipe can be used for any edible leaf, like bee balm or mugwort.

ABOVE: *Infusing leaves in hot water*

BEE BALM SYRUP

Makes 1–1 1/2 cups

Bee balm makes an excellent substitute for oregano, which you may not think of as a cocktail ingredient, but in this light syrup it blends nicely with pisco, tequila, and rum.

INGREDIENTS

- 1/4 cup dried or 1 cup fresh bee balm leaves
- 1 cup boiling water
- Sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Crush dried leaves or spank fresh leaves, then put them in a jar or teapot and pour the boiling water over them. Let steep, covered, for at least 15 minutes, or until the strength of the flavor pleases you. Strain off and discard the bee balm.

Measure the infusion and pour it into a saucepan. Add half as much sugar by volume as you have liquid, and whisk the sugar and the infusion together over medium heat until the sugar has completely dissolved. Pour into a glass bottle or canning jar.

The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave 1/4 inch headspace.

BEE BALM COBBLER

The cobbler was originally a cocktail composed of a base spirit, sugar, and fresh fruit. Sherry was the first base spirit, but whiskey was soon added to the list, as was brandy, wine, and gin. The cobbler was served over crushed ice, which was quite a novelty in the early 1800s when the cocktail was created.

Today it's pretty much anything goes with cobblers. Gone are the days of plain fruit and sugar. Now cobblers often include fruit juice and herbs. And they are frequently made with vermouth. Are we living in a lawless cocktail society? Are there no rules? Does this drink even qualify to be a cobbler? I don't know. But it's delicious and I like the way the name sounds.

INGREDIENTS

- **1½** ounces cherry plum ratafia or sweet vermouth
- **1** ounce pisco
- **½** ounce bee balm syrup
- **¼** ounce fino sherry
- **¼** ounce silverberry juice

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine all the ingredients in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds, then strain into a rocks glass filled with crushed ice. Sip your cobbler with a straw.

PICKING BEE BALM

Bee balm (*Monarda* spp.) is a common wildflower that is also grown as an ornamental garden plant. It is prone to powdery mildew in late summer and early fall, so be sure to collect only clean, mildew-free leaves for this syrup. Bee balm flowers are equally flavorful and can be used to make a flower syrup, but since their flavor is savory, use a light syrup, rather than the simple syrup method described for flowers. Bonus: red bee balm flowers make an especially pretty sweetener.

SPRUCE TIP SYRUP

Makes 1–1 1/2 cups

Because spruce tips are tougher than deciduous foliage like bee balm leaves, you'll need to simmer them rather than just steep them in boiled water. Combined with spruce tip vodka, this syrup makes a fresh, spicy Merry Woodsman that's almost better than a walk in the woods.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** cup roughly chopped spruce tips
- **1** cup water
- **1** cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine all three ingredients in a saucepan, bring to a gentle boil, and whisk to blend in sugar. Remove from the heat, cover, and let the syrup sit overnight. Strain and seal in a glass bottle or canning jar.

The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave 1/4 inch headspace.

PICKING SPRUCE TIPS

Young spruce tips (*Juniperus* spp.) are soft and feathery; it's easy to twist them off with your fingertips, although you can also use pruners if you don't want sticky fingers. The difference between the tender young tips and the stiff older spruce foliage is clear. Harvest your spruce tips evenly from around the circumference of the tree. If you harvest from only one side of the tree, you'll end up with an oddly shaped spruce.

Fresh Fruit Syrups

Syrups can be made from all kinds of fruits. For fresh fruit syrups, the first step is to juice the fruit and strain off the solids. The resulting juice is used instead of water in making a fruit simple syrup. This method can be used for both soft and firm fruits, although firm fruits will require more chopping and more cooking to release their juices. Grapes, prickly pear, elderberries, Oregon grapes, and cornelian cherries fall into the soft fruit category, while rose hips, flowering quince, and crab apples fall into the firm fruit category.

You'll need a jelly bag or several layers of cheesecloth to strain the fruit juice. A mesh strainer isn't fine enough to catch all the solids and a coffee filter won't let the juice flow through.

SOFT FRUIT SYRUP: CORNELIAN CHERRY

Soft fruits require only a brief cooking time to release their flavorful juices. This recipe calls specifically for cornelian cherries, but the method works with any soft fruit.

The ingredient amounts are scalable, as your yield will depend on the amount of fruit you gather. Having at least 2 cups of fruit is a good start.

Put the fruit in a saucepan and barely cover with water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and let simmer for 5 minutes, mashing occasionally with a potato masher to release the juices.

Pour the fruit into a jelly bag set over a bowl and let it hang until all the juice has been extracted. Resist the temptation to squeeze the jelly bag or the liquid may turn cloudy; it will still taste good but it will be less gorgeous.

Measure the juice and return it to your saucepan. Add an equal amount of sugar, and whisk the juice and sugar together over medium heat to combine. You want the sugar to be fully dissolved; when you rub a little liquid between your fingers, it should feel smooth.

It's important not to overcook the syrup. Cornelian cherries have more pectin than any other fruit I know, and overcooking the syrup will turn it to jelly in a flash. As soon as the sugar has dissolved, remove the syrup from the heat, skim any foam from the surface of the syrup, let it cool, then pour into bottles or canning jars.

The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave ¼ inch headspace.

PICKING CORNELIAN CHERRIES

Cornelian cherries (*Cornus mas*) are native to southern Europe and the Middle East, where they're a valued fruit crop. Elsewhere they are grown as an ornamental, planted for their delicate yellow spring flowers. You'll find cornelian cherries in parks and botanic gardens where they're used as hedges, allées, or specimen trees. Cornelian cherry fruit ripens in late summer to early fall. However, it looks ripe long before it's ready to pick. Leave the fruit on the tree until it's dark red and falls into your hand at the slightest touch. You can even harvest fruit from the ground, a sure sign it's ripe. If you're collecting in a public place where picking from trees might be frowned upon, it's an especially good idea to harvest fallen fruit.

THE SHOHOLA SCOFFLAW

The word *scofflaw* was created during Prohibition to describe someone who drank illegally. (That person scoffed at the law.) Soon after, the scofflaw cocktail was created in Paris, either to taunt or to encourage the scofflaws back in the States. Traditionally, it includes rye, vermouth (white or red), lemon juice, and grenadine.

I kept rye as the base spirit, then spun off into foraged ingredients. Rye is a lovely whiskey, leaner and less sweet than bourbon, subtler than Scotch. Rye makes me think of severity and cold climates, where a delicious cocktail is just what you need to warm up from the inside.

Why Shohola, you ask? Because I have a home in Shohola, Pennsylvania, and it's where I made both the cherry plum ratafia (standing in for vermouth) and the cornelian cherry syrup (taking the place of grenadine). And while I always encourage ethical foraging, it would not be entirely inaccurate to say there was some law scoffing involved in obtaining the plums that flavored the first versions of this drink. That's all I'm saying.

I've left out the lemon juice because cornelian cherries are very tart, and the acidity carries through to the syrup. Grenadine, made from pomegranate juice, is less tart than cornelian cherries and needs the acidic edge that lemon juice brings to the party.

INGREDIENTS

- **3** ounces rye whiskey
- **1½** ounces cornelian cherry syrup
- **1** ounce cherry plum ratafia

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine all the ingredients in a cocktail shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a chilled rocks glass.

FIRM FRUIT SYRUP: ROSE HIP

Makes 4–5 cups

This recipe calls specifically for rose hips, but the method works with any firm fruit. Basically the juicing process is the same as it is for soft fruits, but since the fruit is less juicy to begin with, there are a few extra steps. Chopping the fruit in advance helps release the juices. Rose hips and crab apples can be roughly chopped in a blender. Flowering quince should be chopped by hand; the fruit is too large and too hard for a normal blender.

Also, to extract as much juice as possible from firm fruits, use the pulp twice: after straining the fruit the first time, return the pulp to the pan with more water and process it a second time.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** cups rose hips, or any firm fruit
- Sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Rinse the rose hips and twist off the dried calyx (the thing that looks like a star attached to one end). Put the rose hips in your blender and add enough water to cover them halfway. Pulse your

blender to roughly chop the rose hips. You're not trying to purée them; you just want to break them up to let the juices out.

Transfer the chopped rose hips to a saucepan and add enough water to barely cover them. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes. If there are any hips that didn't get chopped, mash them with a potato masher. After 5 minutes, turn off the heat and let the rose hips sit in the hot water for 15 minutes.

Pour the hips into a jelly bag set over a bowl and let the juice drain. Don't squeeze the jelly bag as the juice is draining, or your syrup may be cloudy.

Return the hips to the pan and, again, add just enough water to cover the fruit. Repeat the simmering/draining process as described above.

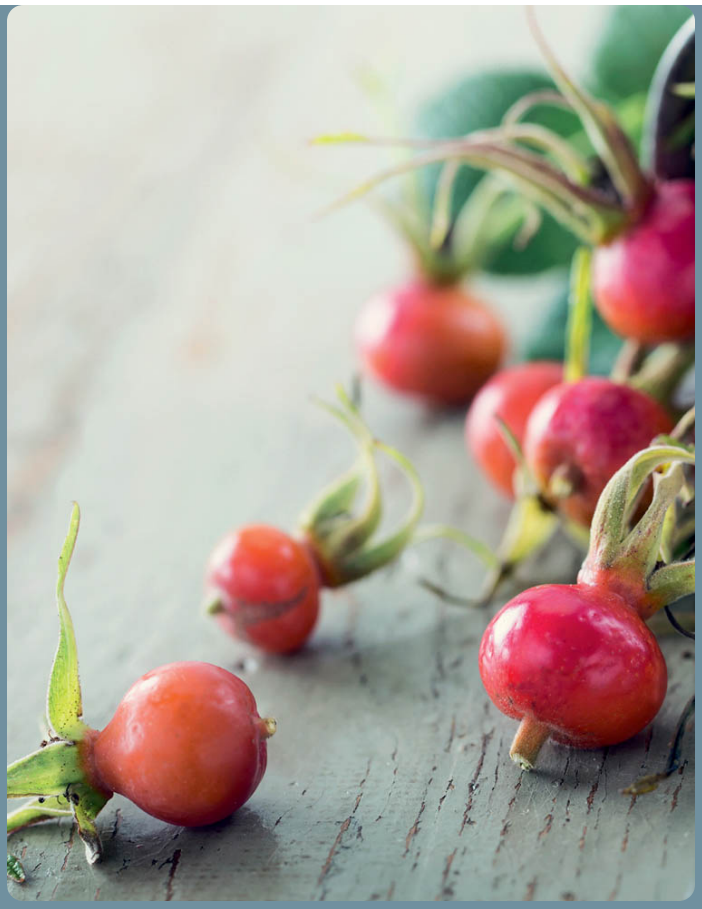
Measure your strained juice, and for every cup of juice, add 1 cup of sugar. Whisk the sugar and juice together in the saucepan over medium heat, until the sugar is completely dissolved. If the liquid starts to boil, reduce the heat to a simmer. Cook for 5 minutes, then remove from the heat and allow it to cool. Pour the cooled syrup into bottles or canning jars.

The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave ¼ inch headspace.

PICKING ROSE HIPS

Ripe rose hips (*Rosa* spp.) may be red or orange and should be harvested when they're plump and firm, with just a little give to them when you squeeze. You may hear that rose hips are sweeter after a frost, but you run the risk of them drying or rotting if you wait that long. Since you'll add sugar to the rose hips to make this syrup, their sweetness is less of a worry, and I suggest you harvest your rose hips as soon as they're ripe. If you plan to use the rose hips without additional sugar, waiting until later in the season will provide a sweeter fruit.

If it's not rose hip season where you live, you can rehydrate dried rose hips to use as a garnish. Steep them in distilled rose water for a little extra flavor.



ROSE SIP 75

Guest Mixologist: Rachel Ford

Rachel Ford, CEO of FML (Ford Marketing Lab), is the national gin ambassador for Diageo, representing Tanqueray, Booth's, and Gordon's gin. She earned her bachelor's degree in business administration, but the lure of the cocktail proved irresistible and Rachel soon left the world of business for the world of craft cocktails. She has won national cocktail competitions, designed innovative cocktail menus for bars on both coasts, and crisscrossed the country educating the public about Diageo gins.

She especially enjoys teaching nonbartenders about mixology. "Bartending should be exciting, friendly, and never intimidating. We should make it accessible to everyone. My favorite guests, when working behind the bar, are the ones who know very little but have that curiosity and are happy to learn and try. Making someone's world open up to new experiences and offering a drink that caters to their individual palate is the most exciting thing about bartending for me."

Rachel is drawn to gin for its depth, complexity, and mixability in cocktails. When creating a new cocktail, she likes to start with something familiar, then give it a twist, or three. The traditional French 75 cocktail is made from gin, champagne, lemon juice, and sugar. It's named after the

World War II French 75 mm field gun because drinkers thought it packed a similar wallop.

Rachel's take on this classic is smooth, balanced, and clever. She uses rose hips in two different forms (syrup and actual fruit) and substitutes sparkling rosé for the champagne to give the cocktail an extra layer of rosiness.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** ounce Tanqueray gin
- **½** ounce rose hip syrup
- **½** ounce sumac-ade
- **2** ounces sparkling rosé
- **3** half rose hips, for garnish

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the gin, rose hip syrup, and sumac-ade in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a champagne flute and top with the sparkling rosé. Garnish with rose hips.

DRY FRUIT SYRUPS

This category includes some wild edibles you might not think of as fruits, such as juniper berries, pink peppercorns, spicebush berries, and schisandra fruit. These small, hard fruits may feel dry even when they're fresh. They are most often used as spices, but technically they're fruits, and they have lots of flavor to offer.

You can use these fruits fresh or dried to make a syrup. Either way, because they're not juicy, you need to cook them longer to extract their flavor, making what is called a decoction. A decoction is similar to an infusion in that it uses hot water to extract flavor from a plant. The difference is that a decoction requires you to actually boil the plant in the water.

Decocting is reserved for tougher plant parts, like roots, woody stems, and dry fruits and seeds.

JUNIPER BERRY SYRUP

Makes 1 1/2 cups

Juniper syrup combines the bitter flavor of concentrated juniper berries with the sweetness of a simple syrup. In the Santa Fe Sundowner, that plays well against the floral lavender and also reinforces the juniper flavor typical of gin.

INGREDIENTS

- **3** tablespoons fresh or **1½** tablespoons dried juniper berries
- **1** cup water
- **1** cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Roughly break up the juniper berries in a spice grinder or mortar and pestle. Combine with the water and sugar in a saucepan and bring to a boil, whisking to dissolve the sugar. Reduce the heat and simmer gently for 20 minutes. Remove the syrup from the heat, cover, and allow it to steep overnight. Strain the liquid into a glass bottle or canning jar.

The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave 1/4 inch headspace.

PICKING JUNIPER BERRIES

Many species of juniper produce edible berries (technically, fleshy cones), but the fruit of common juniper (*Juniperus communis*) is generally considered to be the most flavorful. Common juniper may be a low-growing shrub or a tall tree. Eastern red cedar (*J. virginiana*) also produces tasty, edible berries and is the most common juniper in the eastern United States.

There's some controversy about whether it's safe to eat juniper berries, but for most species this relates to quantity. If eaten in giant handfuls over an extended period of time, juniper berries may be toxic. Or not.

Juniper berries take 2 to 3 years to ripen, so you'll often find both green (unripe) and purple/blue (ripe) fruit on the tree at the same time. Only pick ripe, dark blue or purple berries. Unripe berries taste terrible. To preserve your harvest for up to a year, dry juniper berries in a dehydrator at about 95°F (35°C), until they are hard and brittle.

SANTA FE SUNDOWNER

Juniper and lavender both grow well in hot, dry climates like New Mexico, where this cocktail was conceived. Lavender's flavor is strongest when the buds haven't quite opened, so you'll have to sacrifice a little beauty in your garden to create some magic behind the bar. (Or you can order dried lavender buds online.)

With its strong scent and flavor, lavender quickly infuses the gin that is used as the base. Making ice cubes with a sprig of it adds a surprise finishing touch to the composed drink.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces lavender-infused gin
- ½ ounce juniper syrup
- **2** ounces seltzer
- **1** lavender ice cube

TO MAKE LAVENDER ICE CUBES

Boil enough water to fill an ice cube tray, then let it cool. (Boiling ensures a clear ice cube, which doesn't taste better but is prettier to look at.) Fill the tray with water, place a lavender flower spike in each cube, cover the tray with plastic wrap, and freeze.

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the gin and juniper syrup in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a rocks glass, add the seltzer, and finish with a lavender ice cube.

SCHISANDRA SYRUP

Makes 1–1 1/2 cups

Schisandra syrup adds layers of spicy flavors to everything it touches. They don't call it five-flavor berry for nothing.

INGREDIENTS

- **3** tablespoons dried schisandra berries
- **1** cup water
- **1** cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the crushed berries with the water and sugar in a saucepan and bring to a boil, whisking to dissolve the sugar. Reduce the heat and simmer, uncovered, for 20 minutes, then remove from the heat, cover, and let sit overnight.

Strain the cooled liquid into a bottle or jar, seal, and refrigerate.

The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave 1/4 inch headspace.

PICKING SCHISANDRA

Schisandra chinensis is a temperate woody vine with beautiful, bright red berries. Its common name, five-flavor berry, refers to the fact that the fruit is salty, sweet, sour, spicy, and bitter all at the same time. It's used in Chinese medicine, but in the United States schisandra is a popular ornamental plant. Most people ignore the pendant clusters of fruit, but I find their flavor irresistible; it's sharp, tart, and penetrating.

Schisandra berries ripen in mid- to late summer (depending on where you live). You can eat them fresh, but drying the fruit preserves the flavor for year-round cocktail enjoyment.

TWO SISTERS

I first wanted to call this cocktail Two Strippers because I thought the names *Carissa* and *Schisandra* sounded very stripper-esque. In the end I decided on Two Sisters because the flavors, while very different, work together so well.

The sweet and mild pulp of carissa, a.k.a. Natal plum, cries out to be paired with rum, another tropical treat. The pungency of schisandra unites and brightens the carissa and rum, giving us a sweet-tart cocktail full of fresh fruit and complex flavor.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces añejo rum
- **2** ounces carissa purée
- **1** ounce schisandra syrup

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the rum, carissa purée, and syrup in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. As with all cocktails that use

fruit pulp, this drink has a thick texture. Strain into a coupe glass and enjoy.

PICKING NATAL PLUM

Carissa macrocarpa, also known as Natal plum (because it's native to the Natal province of South Africa), is a popular hedge plant in southern Florida and California. Most people plant the shrub for its shiny evergreen foliage and fragrant white flowers, never imagining that the fruit is quite sweet.

Natal plum fruit ripens to a deep cherry red and should be picked when the fruit is soft and slightly squishy to the touch. The skins are edible, and you can run the whole fruits through a food mill to remove the seeds.

Nut Syrups

Orgeat (pronounced OR-zhea) is the name of a classic cocktail ingredient. It's essentially a syrup made from blanched almonds, with a little rose or orange flower water and a little cognac added to it. Orgeat adds a milky sweetness to cocktails and is often used in tiki drinks, elaborate cocktails that combine fruit juices and syrups, usually with different styles of rum. They are often served in kitschy Polynesian-style glasses and garnished with little umbrellas. Orgeat can also be enjoyed in mocktails and combines well with tart fruit juices.

Many types of nuts can be used to make nut milks and syrups, and all require a little extra processing since the hard nuts need to be broken up and steeped for hours to extract their flavors. You can use this basic recipe for acorns, hazelnuts, or almonds. Because acorns are bitter and have high levels of tannins, they must be leached before they can be used. Hazelnuts and almonds do not require leaching.

ACORN ORGEAT

Makes approximately 3 cups

Unleached acorns range from mildly bitter to horribly astringent, but once the tannins have been leached from the nuts they are mild, rich, and nutty.

Acorns can be leached in either hot or cold water. Cold water leaching takes longer but leaves the starch intact, which is essential if you're going to bake with acorns. Since we're not baking here, we can use hot water, which is quicker.

Keep some leached acorns on hand for infusing in bourbon or making liqueur. They'll keep best in the freezer and can be ground up as needed before steeping them in your base spirit.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** cup shelled acorns
- Water
- Sugar
- **1** ounce cognac
- **1** teaspoon rose water or orange flower water

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the acorns in a pot with enough water to cover them by several inches. Bring to a boil, and boil until the water turns dark

brown. This may take up to 30 minutes. Pour off the water and repeat the process several times. After the third or fourth boil, taste an acorn. If it's not bitter, you're ready to make the syrup. You may have read that the acorns are fully leached when the boiling water is clear, but sometimes the water never clears, even after 10 boilings. Go by the taste of the acorn rather than the color of the water.

Combine the leached acorns with 2 cups water in a heavy-duty blender and blend until you have a smooth slurry. Pour into a bowl, cover it, and let it sit overnight. (Grinding the acorns in water releases their oils intact to make a nut milk.)

Strain the slurry through a jelly bag, squeezing every last drop of liquid out of the mix. Discard the solids and measure the liquid. Put the liquid in a saucepan with an equal amount of sugar and whisk to combine over medium heat. When the sugar is thoroughly dissolved, remove the syrup from the heat and allow it to cool.

Add the cognac and rose water or orange flower water to the syrup. The cognac acts as both a flavoring and a preservative. The flower water adds a subtle but definite flavor.

Acorn orgeat will keep in the refrigerator for up to a month. This is an emulsion, not a solution, which means the liquid will separate over time. A quick shake will blend everything together again and render the orgeat ready to use.

PICKING ACORNS

I'm often asked what kind of acorns (*Quercus* spp.) I prefer to cook with, those from red oaks or those from white oaks. White oak acorns are generally considered less bitter than red oak acorns, but that makes no difference to me, since I'm going to leach them anyway. I simply gather the biggest acorns I can find because the most labor-intensive part of processing acorns is the shelling.

Acorns can easily be cracked by placing them between layers of a dish towel, then smacking them with a rubber mallet. You can also use a nut cracker. Either way, you have to pry the nut meat out of the shell with your fingers or a nut pick. You may have to leach red oak acorns longer than you would white oak acorns, but leaching is a piece of cake compared to shelling.

Gather large acorns as soon as possible after they've fallen from the trees. Discard any acorns with a small hole in them. This is the exit hole of an oak weevil larva that has been feeding on the nut all summer.

HOBBIT HOLLOW

The beer cocktail might sound like a novelty item, but it's been around for centuries. Combinations of beer, rum, eggs, and spices were popular among sailors in the 1700s. The name of this drink was inspired by both the woodland ingredients (mushrooms and acorns) and the colloquial meaning of the word *hollow*, a rural valley where you might find hobbits, moonshiners, or both.

Take into consideration the flavors of both the beer and the spirit you want to work with. Then ask yourself whether you want them to complement or contrast with each other. This cocktail was born after I infused some bourbon with candy cap mushrooms. The dried mushrooms have a strong maple syrup scent, but the infusion wasn't sweet, as I expected. In fact, it was almost bitter in a beery kind of way.

I tried several beers, some that shared the bitter flavor profile of the infused bourbon, some that contrasted with it. In the end I chose one with hints of fruit and a little sweetness. It balanced the bourbon and the carbonation brightened and lightened the drink as a whole.

The inclusion of egg makes this drink a flip, a category of cocktails that uses eggs to produce a creamy texture. If you're uncomfortable with raw eggs, you can leave it out.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** ounce mushroom-infused bourbon
- **1** teaspoon acorn orgeat
- **1** teaspoon verjuice
- **½** of one well-beaten egg
- **2** ounces beer

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the bourbon, orgeat, verjuice, and half of an egg in a shaker and dry-shake for 30 seconds. Add ice and shake again for 30 seconds to thoroughly chill the cocktail. Strain into a rocks glass, add the beer, and give it a gentle stir.

Stem and Twig Syrups

Both herbaceous and woody stems can be used to make syrups. As with fleshy and dry fruits, the difference in the processing is how long you'll need to cook the plants to get them to release their flavors.

JAPANESE KNOTWEED SYRUP

Herbaceous stems like those of Japanese knotweed can be processed like fleshy fruit. The young stems have a lemony flavor and serve equally well as a vegetable (a sorrel substitute) or a fruit (think rhubarb). While the stems cook down to a green color, the juice, when separated from the stem, makes a lovely pink syrup. (See Picking Japanese Knotweed.) Japanese knotweed syrup is an essential ingredient in a Samurai Sour (below).

The ingredient amounts are scalable, as your yield will depend on the amount of stems you gather. Having at least 2 cups is a good start.

Put the stems in a saucepan and barely cover with water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and let simmer for 5 minutes, mashing occasionally with a potato masher to release the juices.

Pour the softened stems into a jelly bag set over a bowl and let it hang until all the juice has been extracted. Resist the temptation to squeeze the jelly bag or the liquid may turn cloudy; it will still taste good but it will be less attractive.

Measure the juice and return it to your saucepan. Add an equal amount of sugar, and whisk the juice and sugar together over medium heat to combine. You want the sugar to be fully dissolved; when you rub a little liquid between your fingers, it should feel smooth.

The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave 1/4 inch headspace.

SAMURAI SOUR

Japanese knotweed is despised as an invasive weed, yet even this plant has its virtues. The root is recognized as an easily renewable source of resveratrol, an antioxidant that is being tested for its anticarcinogenic properties.

Not being a medical researcher or a chemist, I focus on the tastier aspects of this plant. Its tart, bright, slightly vegetal flavor works well in a simple syrup, and that, in turn, is an excellent mixer for a light, unpeated whiskey. You could use any quality blend or single malt, but using a Japanese whisky lets me call this a Samurai Sour. Who would have thought that a tribute cocktail to the Japanese warrior caste would be pink? Keep an open mind, gentlemen.

If you have an aversion to raw egg whites, you can skip that part, but you'll be missing out. The egg whites, when properly shaken, add a silkiness to the drink, creating an emulsion that is slightly thick and very smooth. The bitters are a finishing touch, not only adding another layer of complexity but also keeping the egg whites smelling fresh (see Using Egg Whites). Use homemade bitters (see chapter 5), or try a store-bought grapefruit bitters to add an edge of citrus to the cocktail.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces unpeated, medium- to light-bodied Japanese whisky
- **2** ounces Japanese knotweed syrup
- **1** tablespoon egg white
- Sumac bitters

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the whisky, knotweed syrup, and egg white in a shaker and dry-shake for 30 seconds. Add ice to the shaker and shake again for 30 seconds to thoroughly chill the cocktail. Strain into a chilled rocks glass and top with a few drops of bitters.

SASSAFRAS TWIG SYRUP

Makes approximately 3 cups

Woody stems, like sassafras twigs, require longer cooking but are just as easy to make into syrups as soft stems. Prune off enough twigs to fill a cup measure when the twigs are cut into 1-inch pieces. An estimate is fine. My favorite way to use sassafras twig syrup is combined with Scotch in a Don't Sass Me.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** cups water
- **2** cups sugar
- **1** cup sassafras twigs, in 1-inch lengths

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the water, sugar, and sassafras twigs in a pot. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 20 minutes. Strain off and discard the twigs. The end result will be pale yellow and generally fruity, with overtones of lemon. Store in a glass bottle or canning jar.

The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave 1/4 inch headspace.

PICKING SASSAFRAS TWIGS

Two parts of the sassafras tree (*Sassafras albidum*) make excellent cocktail ingredients: the fresh young twigs and the roots. **Sassafras twigs** are one of my favorite things to forage in winter because they're so easy to identify in the landscape and not much else is available when you're blanketed in snow. Sassafras twigs stay green all year round, so even if you've forgotten exactly where the sassafras trees are, you can find them easily. (See also Picking Sassafras Root.)

DON’T SASS ME!

I started this recipe looking to riff on a classic rickey. A rickey is a highball cocktail containing a base spirit (usually gin, bourbon, or rye) with lime and sparkling water. No sugar. It’s a refreshing drink and a great alternative to a gin and tonic. But I wanted something a little more spirit forward, so I decided to reduce the sparkling water and try Scotch as a base spirit.

Sassafras twig syrup is thick and smooth, with a spicy, lemony flavor. Combine that with the tart verjuice and you have two layers of lemon in this glass. It’s a great combination with the Scotch whisky, and it’s delicious without any seltzer at all. Try a sip and see what you think. If it’s a little too strong for your taste, stir in an ounce of seltzer after shaking and straining the base of the cocktail. Equally delicious.

If you like the flavor combination but want something a little lighter and more casually sippable, strain the base ingredients into a highball glass and top off with 3 ounces of seltzer for a closer approximation of a classic rickey.

INGREDIENTS

- **1½** ounces medium-bodied, unpeated Scotch whisky (similar to Bruichladdich's Classic Laddie)
- **1** ounce sassafras twig syrup
- **1** tablespoon verjuice
- **1–3** ounces seltzer (optional)

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the whisky, sassafras twig syrup, and verjuice in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a coupe and add seltzer, if desired.

Root Syrups

Like woody twigs, roots and rhizomes require longer cooking to release their flavors. The recipe that follows can be used for both wild ginger rhizomes and sassafras roots, and both roots can be used fresh or dried. Wild ginger has a darker flavor than tropical ginger, but that flavor is complex, spicy, and delicious. Sassafras root produces a syrup with a wonderful pink color and a flavor reminiscent of root beer, for which it was one of the original flavorings.

WILD GINGER SYRUP

Makes approximately 1 cup

This versatile syrup enlivens many beverages. To make homemade wild ginger ale, mix 1 tablespoon of syrup into 8 ounces of club soda, add ice, and stir. You may never buy bottled ginger ale again. If you'd like a more adult beverage, use the syrup with tequila, rum, bourbon, or vodka.

You can give the leftover rhizomes a second life by dehydrating or freezing them to use for baking or in a dry rub.

INGREDIENTS

- **½** ounce (by weight) dried or 2 ounces fresh wild ginger rhizomes
- **1** cup water
- **1** cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Roughly chop the wild ginger rhizomes into pieces ¼ to ½ inch long, to expose as much surface area as possible. Combine the water and sugar in a saucepan over medium heat, whisking until the sugar is fully dissolved. Continue whisking and bring the syrup to a boil. Add the ginger rhizomes and reduce the heat to a low simmer. Let the syrup cook for 20 to 30 minutes, until its

volume is reduced by half and the liquid has the consistency of thin pancake syrup.

Remove the syrup from the heat and let it cool for 4 hours. Strain the syrup into a glass bottle or canning jar.

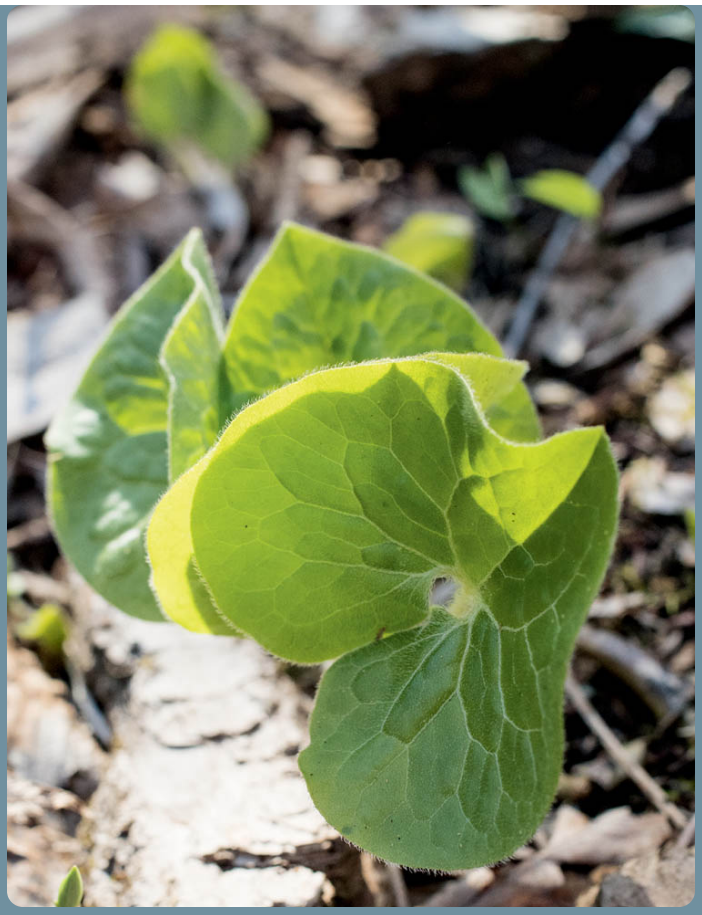
The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes, leaving ¼ inch headspace.

PICKING WILD GINGER

Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*, *A. caudatum*) has a darker flavor than tropical ginger; it's complex, spicy, and delicious. It spreads by underground runners called rhizomes. If you harvest the rhizomes carefully, you won't kill the plant.

Gently dig up several ginger plants, using a shovel or trowel to lift the clump of interconnected plants. Notice how the plants are linked by their rhizomes. Make a cut near the base of each plant, severing the rhizome that connects them but leaving some roots at the base of each ginger. Then, replant the individual plants.

If you're using fresh rhizomes, rinse off the dirt before cooking. If you're using dried rhizomes, we'll assume you cleaned them before drying.



KISS MY SASS

This is a flavor combination made in heaven. If only you could order it in your neighborhood bar. The closest you're likely to find is a rye and root beer, but that's like comparing a McDonald's Quarter Pounder to a grass-fed rib eye steak.

It's worth getting to know the flavor of sassafras root. It was a primary flavor in the original root beer recipe (though it hasn't been used commercially since it was banned by the FDA in 1960; see below). So it'll be familiar, if you've ever drunk a root beer, but superior, with layers of vanilla and anise. I've never met anyone who didn't say "Wow, that's delicious!" after tasting sassafras root for the first time.

Bitters are the finishing touch for this cocktail. It's a perfect example of what bitters can bring to a drink, balancing the sweetness in a way that lets the subtler flavors of both the rye and the sassafras shine. Sumac bitters are lighter than commercial bitters, so you'll need to use more than you may be used to if you're accustomed to Angostura or Peychaud's.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces rye whiskey
- **2** ounces sassafras root syrup
- **10** drops sumac bitters

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the rye and sassafras root syrup in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a rocks glass and finish with the bitters.

SAFROLE SEEMS SAFE . . . TO ME

Sassafras root has been banned as a food additive by the USDA, purportedly because it's carcinogenic. Most foragers are not convinced. No human case of cancer has ever been attributed to safrole, the active ingredient in sassafras, and the amounts fed to lab rats to produce cancer are so great as to be ridiculous when translated to human consumption. Safrole is, however, an essential ingredient in the manufacture of ecstasy (MDMA). You do the math.

PICKING SASSAFRAS ROOT

Mature sassafras trees (*Sassafras albidum*) are often surrounded by young clones, which grow from the roots of the mother tree. Grasp the stems of 18- to 24-inch trees as close to the ground as possible and pull hard. You may need to loosen the soil. Rinse off the root portion (but don't scrub too hard; you want that fragrant root bark), chop it into pieces about 1 inch long, and decoct it according to the instructions for wild ginger syrup. If you don't find sassafras where you forage, you can often find the dried root in health food stores or herb shops.

Two Unusual Syrups

I wasn't kidding when I said you could make a syrup out of almost everything. Mushrooms and seed pods are unusual syrup ingredients and require slightly different cooking methods than those described for leaves and roots. But the unique flavors make them well worth the effort.

CHANTERELLE SYRUP

Makes 1–1 1/2 cups

Mushrooms might seem like an unlikely cocktail ingredient, but they work well in both sweet and savory drinks. Mushroom syrups can be made from fresh, frozen, or dried mushrooms. The proportions for fresh and frozen mushrooms will be the same. If you're using dried mushrooms, use half as many as you would fresh. Wendy Petty devised this clever method for coaxing maximum flavor out of chanterelle mushrooms, then used the results in her La Chanterelle cocktail.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** cup water
- **1** cup sugar
- **1** cup chanterelles

INSTRUCTIONS

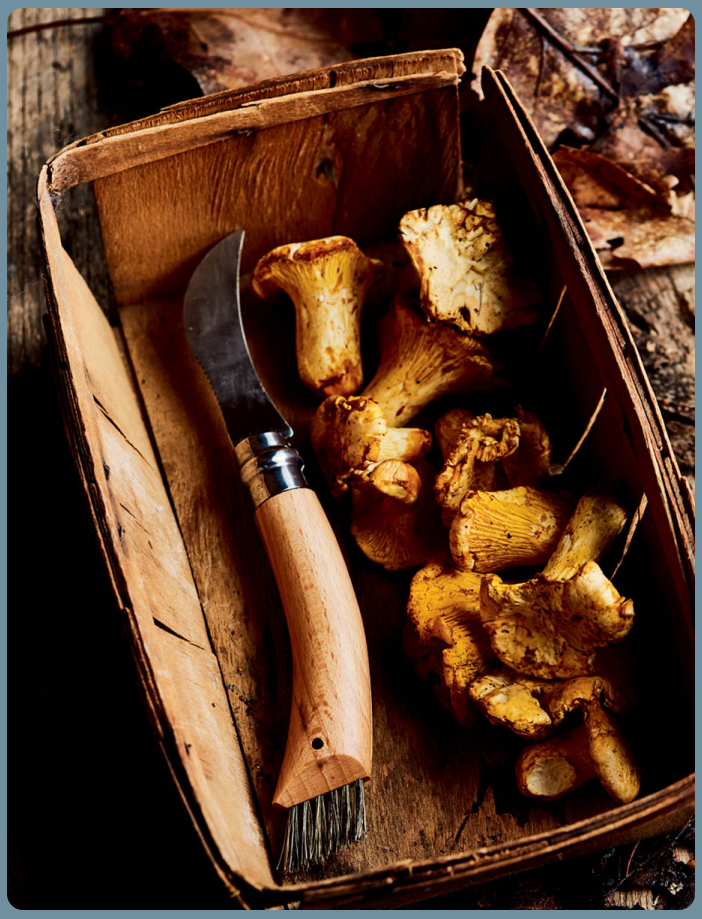
Combine the water and sugar in a small pan over medium heat and whisk until the sugar has completely dissolved. Add the chanterelles and cook over very low heat, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes. Do not allow the syrup to simmer. Remove from the heat and let the mixture cool, then reheat for another 15 minutes, again not allowing the syrup to boil. Remove the pan from the heat, cover, and let the liquid infuse overnight.

The next morning, strain the syrup into a glass bottle or canning jar. Save the candied mushroom pieces to garnish your La Chanterelle cocktail.

The syrup will keep up to 3 months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Leave ¼ inch headspace.

PICKING CHANTERELLES

People go crazy for chanterelles (*Cantharellus cibarius*). Is it the color, the fruity aroma, the superb taste and texture, or all of the above? (Hint: it's all of the above.) Depending on where you live, chanterelle season may be anywhere from June through September. They're easy to spot because of their bright orange color and may be anywhere from the size of your palm to the size of your fingernail. Most people go for the large meaty mushrooms, which are certainly delicious. But small, juicy, tender chanterelles are perfect for this syrup recipe.



LA CHANTERELLE

Guest Mixologist: Wendy Petty

Wendy Petty is an extraordinary forager who lives in Denver, Colorado. She walks the walk: teaching, writing, and using wild edibles on a daily basis. Foraging connects Wendy to the land she loves and strengthens her bonds with her community. “It’s no longer just a playful thing for me to cook with found foods,” she says. “It’s an expression of who I am, because I am so very much of this place. My cells are made of these Rocky Mountains; my compass always points me back home.”

Wendy is a sensualist, reveling in the flavors, smells, and textures of wild edibles. She is also a consummate professional; foraging is both her work and her passion. Wendy cares deeply about passing on this knowledge, spotlighting plants that are weedy and abundant and showing others how to translate those wild edibles into recipes that can be a real part of their everyday kitchen repertoire.

While Wendy writes about all types of wild edibles on her blog, *Hunger and Thirst*, she admits to having a special love for mushrooms and would never turn down a good cocktail.

Originally Wendy made candied chanterelles to decorate a cake, but when faced with the leftover syrup, she began to

consider cocktail possibilities and thought the fruity, sweet flavor of chanterelles was a natural to pair with white rum.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces chanterelle- infused white rum
- ¼ ounce chanterelle syrup
- ¼ ounce fino sherry
- Candied chanterelles, for garnish

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the rum, syrup, and sherry in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a small glass and garnish with several candied chanterelles.

CAROB SYRUP

You can buy carob syrup in health food stores if you want to explore the taste, but making your own, from homemade carob powder, gives you the fresh, pure flavor of this naturally sweet seed pod. It's the flesh of the pod that's tasty — the seeds are discarded in the process of making the powder.

TO MAKE THE POWDER

Makes about 1/2 cup

INSTRUCTIONS

Place three or four whole carob pods in a large pot and completely cover them with water. Bring the pot to a boil and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes, then turn off the heat and let the pods soak for 5 to 6 hours.

Slice each softened pod along the seam and remove the seeds inside. If you have a dehydrator, dry the split pods at 125°F (50°C). If you don't have a dehydrator, place the pieces in a single layer on a cookie sheet in the oven at the lowest possible setting. Dry the pods until they are easy to snap in two.

Grind the dried pods in a Vitamix or blender, or in small batches in a spice grinder. You can use your carob powder for baking, but for cocktails it's more versatile as a syrup.

TO MAKE THE SYRUP

Makes approximately 10 ounces

INGREDIENTS

- **1** cup water
- **½** cup carob powder
- **2** tablespoons agave nectar
- **½** teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS

Warm ¼ cup of the water, then add the carob powder and stir well to make a paste. Carob does not dissolve in water like chocolate does, and making this paste creates a smoother syrup. Still, you will always feel the grain of the carob.

Transfer the paste to a saucepan and add the remaining ¾ cup water and the agave nectar. Bring the mixture to a boil, whisking to combine, then reduce the heat and simmer for 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the vanilla.

In the refrigerator the syrup will last for several weeks. For long-term storage, process half-pint jars for 10 minutes in a boiling water bath, leaving ¼ inch headspace.

PICKING CAROB PODS

Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*) grows best in warm, dry climates. In the United States, that translates to USDA hardiness zones 9 to 11, including southern Florida, the Gulf states, Southern California, Arizona, and New Mexico. (You can also purchase whole pods if they don't grow near you.) Carob pods dry on the tree and then fall to the ground. After you've gathered the pods, bring them back to the kitchen and rinse them off; they're often a little dusty.

THE CAROB ALGORITHM

I love bringing home unusual ingredients I've been able to forage while traveling. It's an opportunity to work with new flavors from distant parts of the world. After a trip to Jerusalem I became obsessed with carob — and more than a little envious of wildcrafters in warmer climates who can forage for it at home.

The inspiration for this cocktail came from the Peruvian Algarrobina cocktail, named after its key ingredient, carob syrup (which is also called algarrobina). Most Algarrobina recipes are for frozen, blended drinks, and while those are certainly refreshing, the large quantity of ice dilutes the alcohol. Traditional Algarrobina recipes call for cinnamon and evaporated milk, in addition to the carob syrup.

That's the jumping-off point. Here's where we're going: Swap out the cinnamon for spicebush dram, which adds spice and a little rum to the drink. Use fresh cream instead of evaporated milk. And make your own carob syrup from homemade carob powder.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces pisco
- ½ ounce carob syrup
- **1** teaspoon spicebush dram
- **1** teaspoon egg yolk
- **1** teaspoon cream

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine all the ingredients in a shaker and dry-shake for 30 seconds. Add ice and shake again for 30 seconds to thoroughly chill the cocktail. Strain into a glass. You'd expect this drink to be heavy, with the cream and egg, but it's surprisingly refreshing. And very festive.

Jam Cocktails

Jams and jellies are closely related to syrups. And believe it or not, there is an entire category of cocktails known as jam cocktails. They are exactly what they sound like: cocktails with a dollop of jam. You can use jellies, too, but a stiff jelly may be hard to distribute throughout a cocktail even with very vigorous shaking. If you make your own jelly, aim for a soft set, or use it in a blended drink.

Jam cocktails are supremely adaptable creations. Just think about which jam flavors combine with which spirits and go where your taste buds lead you.

PRICKLY PEAR JELLY

Makes approximately 5 cups

No matter how many times I cut open a prickly pear fruit I'm surprised by its color. On the outside they're a pretty pink, but cut the fruit open and the vibrant magenta color is truly outstanding. Of course I don't eat prickly pear fruit just because it's pretty. The fruit has a unique flavor, sort of a combination of watermelon and apple.

When I make juice from prickly pears I don't bother to skin them. I slice them into quarters and treat them as I would any fruit: barely cover them with water, bring to a boil, mash, and strain through a jelly bag. This produces a perfectly silky juice and at the same time it gets rid of any spines and glochids left on the fruit.

INGREDIENTS

- **4** cups prickly pear juice
- **4** tablespoons lemon juice
- **4½** tablespoons powdered pectin
- **3** cups sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the prickly pear and lemon juices with the pectin in a heavy-bottomed pot and bring the mixture to a boil that can't be

stirred down.

Add the sugar all at once, and when the mixture once again reaches a boil that can't be stirred down, let it boil hard for 1 minute, then remove it from the heat. Skim off any foam. Pour the hot liquid into jars and seal tightly.

The jam will keep for several months in the refrigerator. For long-term storage, process in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes, leaving ¼ inch headspace..

PICKING PRICKLY PEARS

Prickly pears (*Opuntia* spp.) are more than just desert plants; they're native to 48 states and large parts of Canada. Fruit ripens in late summer to early fall and should be harvested when flushed with color. Wear leather gloves or use tongs to harvest; the fruit is covered with spines and glochids (small, sharp, barbed hairs), just like the prickly pear pads.

PRICKLY CAIPIRINHA

Prickly pear juice is an irresistible cocktail ingredient, not only because it's got a great flavor, but because the color is almost otherworldly in its beauty. Who would expect such a gorgeous juice to come from such a dangerous-looking fruit?

You'll see prickly pear margaritas on lots of menus, and I get that. Prickly pears are from cacti and tequila is distilled from an equally succulent desert plant. But cachaça brings an earthy, almost hay-scented flavor to the sweet-tart taste of prickly pear fruit. Made with crushed ice, this is a tiki drink with attitude. Fresh lime juice balances the sweetness of the prickly pear syrup, adding a tasty acidity to the cocktail. A green slice of lime makes a striking garnish for a bright pink drink.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces cachaça
- **1** ounce prickly pear jelly
- **1** ounce fresh lime juice
- **1** cup crushed ice
- **1** slice lime

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the cachaça, jelly, lime juice, and ice in a blender and pulverize. Pour into an old-fashioned glass and garnish with the slice of lime.

WHAT IS CACHAÇA?

Cachaça, like rum, is made from distilled sugarcane juice, like the *rhums agricoles* of the French West Indies. The United States classifies cachaça as a rum, but in Brazil (where it is the national drink) it is considered an entirely different spirit. It is most commonly used in caipirinhas, which combine lime juice, sugar, and cachaça.

CHAPTER FOUR

Wild Liqueurs: Maceration, Fermentation, and Distillation

Alas, home distillation of alcohol without a federal permit is illegal in the United States. And those permits are not easy to come by. Therefore, there will be no discussion here of distilling spirits from foraged materials. If this is something that interests you, look toward more enlightened countries like New Zealand and the Netherlands, where home distillation of alcohol for personal use is legal, even without a license.

Even though you can't legally distill your own spirits in the United States, you can flavor distilled spirits with foraged ingredients, thanks to the processes of maceration and infusion. *Maceration* is the term used to describe soaking a solid object in a liquid. It's often used interchangeably with *infusion*, although there is a small difference. You macerate your mulberries in vodka; you infuse the vodka with mulberries. The process may be exactly the same, but the word you use depends on how you view the final product. If you're looking to create boozy berries, you're macerating. If you're making a fruity booze, you're infusing. But that's a technicality. In the real world, people use the words interchangeably.

You can make macerations and infusions with several kinds of liquids, including water, vinegar, and spirits. To make a shrub, you macerate wild fruit in vinegar. To make a foraged aperitif or liqueur, you infuse a wine or spirit with one or more wild ingredients.

WHAT'S A LIQUEUR?

Liqueur is a general term used to describe a spirit-based-beverage flavored with fruits, spices, or nuts. Liqueurs are often sweet and may have a silky or syrupy consistency. In the US they are sometimes also called cordials, but in the UK a cordial is a nonalcoholic concentrated syrup (often fruit based) that is diluted and drunk as a soft drink. I find the dual use of the word to be confusing. In this book, I decree that a liqueur shall hereafter be known as a boozy concoction and a cordial as a nonalcoholic beverage.

APERITIF OR DIGESTIF?

Technically speaking, an aperitif is served to whet the appetite and a digestif is intended to aid digestion. Modern-day drinkers often use the terms interchangeably, but if you're interested in the where and how of cocktail evolution, here are the facts.

The root of the word *aperitif* is the Latin *aperire*, meaning "to open." Aperitifs should be dry and not too sweet. A sweet drink may dull your appetite rather than stimulate it. It should also not be very high in alcohol, which might dull the taste buds. Aperitifs generally have an ABV of 15 to 25 percent. Classic aperitifs include dry vermouth, Campari, and champagne.

Digestifs were originally concocted with medicinal herbs that acted as tonics. They may be higher in alcohol than aperitifs and may be sweet, bitter, or both. Popular digestifs include cognac, sherry, and Fernet-Branca (although why I do not know, since it tastes terrible).

Macerations/Infusions

You may be surprised by the range of wild edibles you can use to infuse various spirits. Fruits, leaves, roots, mushrooms, and nuts can all be macerated in alcohol to create unique, spiritous

flavor combinations. Harvest dates will vary according to where you live and forage.

ACORN-INFUSED BOURBON

Makes approximately 3/4 cup

Play against the natural sweetness of bourbon by infusing the spirit with acorns.

INGREDIENTS

- 1/4 cup leached acorn meal
- 1 cup bourbon

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the acorn meal and bourbon in a jar with a tight lid. Shake to combine, then let it sit for 1 day. Taste the bourbon. The flavor should be slightly bitter (to balance the sweetness of the bourbon) but not astringent. If you can't taste the acorn bitterness, leave the bourbon to infuse for another day and continue to taste-test. Overinfusing will give you an undrinkable spirit; you probably won't need to infuse for more than 2 days. Once you're happy with the flavor, strain the bourbon and seal it in a jar.

The bourbon will last indefinitely. No refrigeration necessary.

TO MAKE ACORN MEAL

Leach your acorns according to the instructions, but instead of making a slurry, dry them in a dehydrator until they are brittle and can be snapped in two. It will probably take 18 to 24 hours.

Store the leached, dried acorns in the refrigerator until needed, then grind them into a coarse meal using either a hand grinder, a spice grinder, or the dry grains pitcher of a Vitamix.

ACORN LIQUEUR

Makes 1–1 1/2 cups

Acorn liqueur is rich and sweet. The flavor is more concentrated (and boozy) than that of acorn orgeat.

INGREDIENTS

- 1/4 cup leached acorn meal (below)
- 1 cup vodka
- 3/4 cup water
- 3/4 cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the acorn meal and the vodka in a jar with a tight lid. Shake well and let it sit for 1 day. Then taste the vodka. If it tastes slightly bitter and nutty, you're ready to move on to the next step. If not, let the acorns sit for one more day. You won't need more than 48 hours for this infusion. Overinfusing the vodka will leave you with an unpleasantly bitter brew.

Strain off the acorn meal and set the infused vodka aside.

Combine the acorn meal, water, and sugar in a saucepan. Whisk the ingredients together over medium heat, until the sugar dissolves, and then allow them to simmer gently for about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and let the syrup sit for 4 to 5 hours. Strain the syrup through a jelly bag, letting it drip

overnight. (Save the leftover acorn solids. They've been infused with both vodka and sugar and now taste very much like a dense sticky pudding. Bonus! You've got dessert.)

To make your liqueur, combine equal amounts of acorn syrup and acorn vodka in a bottle or jar. Shake well and enjoy.

SQUIRREL'S DELIGHT

Guest Mixologist: Colleen Graham

Colleen Graham is a mixologist with a passion for creating and sharing cocktails that enrich everyday life. She has more than a decade's experience writing about mixing great drinks, both as the cocktail expert for About.com and on her own website, SCDrinkStudio.com. Colleen is also the regular drinks columnist for Maximum Yield's *HydroLife*.

Colleen combines a deep knowledge of classic cocktails and their history with the creativity to experiment with new and interesting flavors. Her inspiration for the Squirrel's Delight came from thinking about bourbon and how it's aged in oak barrels. Since acorns come from oak trees, Colleen wondered what infusing bourbon with acorns would do for the flavor.

She says that steeping the acorns in bourbon is like giving the spirit more time in the barrel; it ages and mellows the bourbon and adds a touch of bitterness to the finish. To balance that bitterness, Colleen made a light cinnamon syrup and used a sweet vermouth to create the Squirrel's Delight. Try this cocktail with a sweeter bourbon like Maker's Mark.

INGREDIENTS

- **1½** ounces acorn-infused bourbon
- ¾ ounce sweet vermouth
- ¾ ounce light cinnamon syrup (below)

TO MAKE THE LIGHT CINNAMON SYRUP

- **1** cinnamon stick
- ½ cup sugar
- **1** cup water

Combine the cinnamon stick, sugar, and water in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Remove the syrup from the heat and let it sit for at least 4 hours and up to overnight. Remove the cinnamon stick and transfer the syrup to a bottle or jar. It will keep in the refrigerator for at least a month.

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine all the ingredients in a chilled shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a rocks glass. Do *not* share with any squirrels, no matter how much they beg.

EARTH & AWE

Guest Mixologist: Duane Sylvestre

Duane Sylvestre, who claims he's been bartending since he was two years old, is equally comfortable behind the bar and in front of an audience. He loves to educate his customers and always aims to give them a wonderful overall experience, as well as a tasty beverage. While his years of experience may be a slight exaggeration, Duane is certainly well established on the DC mixology scene. He's an award-winning mixologist, a member of the DC Craft Bartenders Guild, vice president of the United States Bartenders' Guild (DC chapter), a certified spirits specialist, and a certified sommelier.

What does he like best about bartending? "I tell people it's much more than the drink-making aspect of bartending that I enjoy. I love teaching and entertaining, and the bar is the stage that provides that opportunity for me."

Duane chose Mount Gay Black Barrel rum because of the unique influence of wood on its flavor. Black Barrel is a blend of pot still and column still rums, aged separately, then blended and finished in new charred bourbon barrels. The oak wood of the barrel imparts extra flavor to the rum. The candy cap mushrooms add a hint of maple.

Duane's original recipe called for oloroso sherry, but I decided to try it with mulberry liqueur. Like oloroso sherry,

mulberry liqueur has a caramel, almost raisinlike flavor. It works wonderfully in this recipe.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces candy cap mushroom–infused rum, preferably Mount Gay Black Barrel (below)
- ¾ ounce mulberry liqueur or oloroso sherry
- ½ ounce acorn liqueur

TO MAKE CANDY CAP MUSHROOM–INFUSED RUM

Combine ½ cup dried candy cap mushrooms and 1 cup of spirit (try it with bourbon as an alternative) in a jar, seal tightly, and let steep for at least 2 days. Taste the spirit, and if you're pleased with the strength of flavor, strain off the mushrooms and save them to use in something else, like a mushroom soup. If you'd like a stronger infusion, let it sit for a few more days.

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine all three ingredients in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds, then strain into a coupe.

CAROB HORCHATA

Makes 3–4 cups

Horchata is a Spanish and Latin American beverage traditionally made from ground nuts or seeds, sugar, and water. In this recipe we're infusing milk with carob powder to make carob horchata. There are as many horchata recipes out there as there are horchata makers, which means I didn't feel too guilty about messing with culinary tradition to create this foraged carob horchata. Some use milk, others don't. Some use only rice, some only almonds, others use a combination of both. The amount of sugar varies greatly; I cut it way down, but I've listed a range below in case you like your horchata on the sweet side.

The sole constant seems to be the use of cinnamon as a flavoring. I backed off the cinnamon and vanilla in order to bring the carob flavor to the front.

INGREDIENTS

- **1½** cups hot water
- **1** cup rice
- **1** (1-inch) cinnamon stick
- **3** tablespoons carob powder
- **2** cups milk (cow's, rice, almond, soy)
- **½** teaspoon vanilla extract
- **⅛ – ¼** cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the hot water, rice, cinnamon stick, and carob powder in a blender and pulverize. Let the mixture sit for 4 to 8 hours, then strain through a jelly bag, squeezing every last drop of liquid out of the bag. You'll get 1 to 1 ½ cups of liquid.

Pour the liquid into a quart jar and add the milk, vanilla, and sugar to taste. Shake well.

Store in the refrigerator, where the horchata will keep for 2 or 3 days. The solids settle out after a few hours, so be sure to stir it up before mixing your cocktail.

HEY, SAILOR

Recipes from different countries use a variety of nuts and seeds, including barley, as the basis for horchata. Mexican horchata is traditionally made from rice and/or almonds and flavored with vanilla and cinnamon. It is a cousin of orgeat. Note the similarity of the names?

I struggled with the name for this cocktail but was ultimately inspired by the idea of traveling to forage for the carob and sailors pulling into foreign ports. Mixing homemade horchata with tawny port and a touch of vodka makes it extra special and just a little bit boozy.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces carob horchata
- **1** ounce tawny port
- **½** ounce vodka

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine all the ingredients in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a rocks glass.

CHERRY PLUM RATAFIA

Makes approximately 2 quarts

Ratafia can mean several things, from a specific kind of biscuit dipped in wine to an alcoholic beverage made from the grape juice left over from making champagne. Most often, *ratafia* refers to a fortified wine made from stone fruits like plums, peaches, and apricots. It's simple, requiring only a few ingredients: wine, fruit, sugar, and brandy.

Most people plant cherry plums for their foliage and flowers, never thinking of them as true fruit trees. In fact, many modern cultivars are sterile, because some people are annoyed by dropping fruit. (Those people are not my people.)

When I discovered a cherry plum tree laden with fruit in an abandoned parking lot, I harvested all I could carry and went back for more. After making enough chutney, jam, and jelly to last several years, I discovered a ratafia recipe and I may never make a jar of plum preserves again. Cherry plum ratafia is one of my new favorite wild beverages. It's a superb aperitif and adds unusual flavor to cocktails that call for vermouth.

Most recipes call for an inexpensive wine to make ratafia, and this makes sense, since you're going to be adding flavors, not preserving the exquisite taste of a fine vintage. I chose homemade wild elderberry wine to go with my wild plums.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** cups chopped plums
- **2** (750 ml) bottles red wine
- **⅔** cup sugar
- **½** cup brandy

INSTRUCTIONS

Roughly chop the plums and put them in a half-gallon jar with a tight lid. Include the pits for extra flavor.

Combine the wine, sugar, and brandy in a large bowl and whisk to dissolve the sugar. Many ratafia recipes call for more sugar and extra spices, but I prefer mine on the dry side and I don't want to obscure the flavor of the wild fruit with too many spices. Feel free to play around to reach your own perfect balance.

Pour the liquid into the half-gallon jar and shake to combine. Put the jar in the refrigerator and let steep for 2 to 3 weeks, shaking it once a day. Then strain out the solids and bottle the liquid. (If you can't bear to throw away the boozy plums, you can use them for a very tasty jam.)

Ratafia keeps in the refrigerator for months (the brandy acts as a preservative), but it's hard to make it last that long.

PICKING PLUMS

The small fruits of cherry plums (*Prunus cerasifera*), also called purple leaf plums, ripen in early to midsummer. They're often hard to spot, since the color of the fruit is similar to that of the purple foliage. Cherry plums are tart and flavorful with firm flesh. They can be used any way that regular plums are used, although they may require more sugar to balance their tartness

Note: The kernels of stone fruits (inside the shells) contain amygdalin, which is a cyanide compound. (Remember when you were a kid and your friends told you not to swallow apple seeds or you'd die? Apple seeds also contain amygdalin, which is how that nasty rumor got started.) However, both apple seeds and the kernels of stone fruits must be crushed to release the amygdalin. If the shell of the seed remains intact, there is no danger of cyanide poisoning. If this worries you even a little bit, do not include the pits in your recipe.

KILTY PLEASURE

I don't know why so few people use single-malt Scotch in cocktails. Perhaps they think it's too precious. I'm not suggesting you use a $200 bottle for cocktails. That's probably a whisky that deserves to be sipped on its own. But many single malts make excellent cocktail ingredients, and you shouldn't be afraid to play around with them. It's a worthy spirit, and one that mixes as well as its fellow whiskies: bourbon and rye.

The first basic choice you need to make is between a peated and an unpeated whisky. Scotch is made from malted barley, and the peat flavor in Scotch comes from the process of drying the grain. Barley is usually dried for about 30 hours and may be done over peated heat, unpeated heat, or a combination. The amount of peat flavor in the whisky is determined by how much time the grain is dried over peat smoke. But even unpeated whiskies may have a whisper of smoke in their flavor profile; malted barley itself has a slightly smoky flavor.

Both peated and unpeated whiskies are worth experimenting with. Try this recipe in a side-by-side comparison: one glass made with a peated Scotch and one with an unpeated Scotch. The fruitiness of the ratafia, mulberry liqueur, and verjuice maintains the sweet/sour balance with both types of whisky, but the resulting drinks are very different. Both are spirit-forward drinks, but the

peated whisky mutes the sharpness of the fruits while the unpeated Scotch is a brighter drink. This kind of comparison is a great way to educate your taste buds.

My personal favorite is the lightly peated whisky. If you don't have a single malt on hand, try Johnnie Walker Black. It's an excellent blended whiskey.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** ounce Scotch whisky
- ½ ounce cherry plum ratafia
- ½ ounce mulberry liqueur
- ¼ ounce verjuice
- **1** ounce seltzer

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the whisky, ratafia, mulberry liqueur, and verjuice in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a coupe. Add the seltzer and give it a gentle stir.

CRAB APPLE–INFUSED BOURBON

Tart crab apples balance the sweetness of bourbon when infused in the spirit for several weeks. To infuse the bourbon with crab apples, you'll need to soften the apples; breaking down the structure of the fruit makes it easier for the alcohol to extract flavor. The easiest way to soften the fruit is to freeze and then thaw the crab apples.

I like a traditional bourbon like Jim Beam, Knob Creek, or Wild Turkey for this recipe. Traditional bourbon uses about 70 percent corn and approximately equal amounts of rye and barley.

INGREDIENTS

- **4** cups crab apples
- **1** 750 ml bottle 100-proof Kentucky bourbon
- **2** tablespoons ground dried spicebush berries

INSTRUCTIONS

Fill a half-gallon jar or pitcher with softened crabapples, and add a full bottle of bourbon. (Save the bottle.) Stir in the spicebush berries, then seal the container tightly. Let sit for 3 weeks, shaking the mixture each day. Strain through cheesecloth or a jelly bag, then return the strained bourbon to its original bottle. It

won't be full, because the crab apples will have absorbed some of the bourbon. You can toss the fruit or save it to make a boozy jelly.

Store the infused bourbon in its original bottle; it will keep indefinitely without refrigeration.

CHANTERELLE-INFUSED RUM

Makes 1 cup

The delicate flavor of chanterelle mushrooms requires a delicate spirit. White rum has a hint of sweetness but still allows the taste of the chanterelle to shine through.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** cup white rum
- ¼ cup dried or ½ cup fresh chanterelles

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the rum and chanterelles in a jar and seal tightly. Let sit for about 1 week, shaking every day. After a week, taste the rum. The mushroom flavor should be subtle but noticeable, and the rum should have taken on the color and fragrance of the mushrooms. If it hasn't, continue to infuse the rum, taste-testing every day.

When the flavor pleases you (probably after no more than 2 weeks), strain out the mushrooms and thank them for their service. Or save them to use in soup; I can't bear to throw them away.

Store the infused rum in a bottle or jar with a tight-fitting lid; it will keep indefinitely without refrigeration.

FLOWERING QUINCE LIQUEUR

This liqueur takes months to make, but it is *so* worth it. The finished liqueur is thick, silky, sweet, and highly alcoholic. It is liquid gold, and it should be savored over one clear cube of ice. You can also use it in combination with seltzer or club soda, if you can stand to dilute its perfection.

I usually make a big batch of this liqueur because I'm lucky enough to have lots of foraged flowering quince nearby. The recipe below is for a 1-gallon jar, but if you can only fill a quart jar with the topped fruit, the instructions remain the same. You'll simply need less sugar and less vodka as you move from step to step.

INGREDIENTS

- **About 16** cups chopped quince
- Sugar
- **8** cups vodka

INSTRUCTIONS

Wash the quince fruits and cut them into approximately 2-inch pieces, removing the cores and seeds. Leave the skins on. Fill a gallon jar with the fruit, then add as much sugar as possible, filling all the spaces in between the pieces. Cover the jar and put

it in a warm (not hot) place. Let sit for 4 weeks, shaking the jar every day to help the sugar dissolve. You'll notice the sugar pulling the juices out of the fruit, much as it does in a cold-processed shrub.

After 4 weeks, strain the juice, reserving the fruit pieces, and measure it. From a gallon of fruit, you should get just over 1 quart of juice. Pour the juice into a bottle or jar and refrigerate it.

Return the quince pieces to the gallon jar and add 4 cups of the vodka. Let the jar sit someplace cool for 6 weeks. Strain off the vodka and combine it with the refrigerated juice.

Once again, return the fruit pieces to the gallon jar and pour 4 cups of vodka over them. Return the jar to its cool spot and let sit for 4 weeks. Then strain out and discard the fruit, thanking it for its service. Combine the final vodka with the juice-vodka combination and pour into bottles. At this point, I was told, you should let the liqueur sit for several more months, but that proved to be impossible. I sampled the liqueur and was floored by its rich, floral taste and mouthfeel. Does it get even better with time? Yes. But how much deliciousness can a forager take?

PICKING FLOWERING QUINCE

Flowering quince (*Chaenomeles japonica, C. speciosa*) fruit ripens from early to late fall, depending on where you live. Be careful as you harvest; the fruit is protected by sharp thorns on crisscrossing branches. You may pick newly ripened fruit from the plant, but don't forget to check any fruit that's already fallen from the shrub. Flowering quince is a hard fruit and stays ripe for months, even after falling to the ground.

PUFF OF SMOKE

There are a lot of different flavors in this cocktail, but in the right proportions they come together to make a balanced, delicious libation. It's also pretty darn potent. A hint of smoky mezcal provides subtle flavor, which contrasts nicely with the sweetness of the quince liqueur.

Creating this cocktail was a learning experience. Sometimes you have an idea that comes together in a flash. Other times you need to tinker and tweak, getting the balance just right. This was one of those times. I was *so* close, I knew the flavors were there, but I couldn't get it exactly right.

I started out with equal parts mezcal and tequila, but that covered up the floral quince liqueur. So I backed off the mezcal in increments until it was a supporting player and the sweetness of the quince came through. Still, the finished product needed something else to tie it all together. The ginger syrup did the trick, deepening the sharpness of the blanco tequila and adding a rich flash of spice.

It was worth the trouble.

INGREDIENTS

- **¼** teaspoon smoky mezcal
- **2** ounces blanco tequila
- **1** ounce quince liqueur
- **1** teaspoon wild ginger syrup

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine all the ingredients in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a coupe or flute.

LAVENDER-INFUSED GIN

Most people think of lavender as a scent rather than a flavor, but it's a very tasty culinary herb. The secret is not to overdo it. Too much lavender yields a bitter, soapy flavor. A light touch is all you need.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** (750 ml) bottle dry gin, like Bombay Sapphire or Beefeater
- **1** tablespoon dried or 2 tablespoons fresh lavender buds

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the gin and lavender buds in a quart jar. After 4 hours start tasting the gin; when you like the flavor, strain out the lavender and rebottle the gin. It's easy to overdo this, so keep close tabs on your time. You won't need to infuse the gin for more than 8 hours total; more than that and the infused gin can be bitter.

LICORICE FERN LIQUEUR

Native American tribes in the Pacific Northwest used the rhizomes of licorice fern as medicine for treating colds and sore throats. But I'm not a doctor. I appreciate licorice fern for its culinary uses, and it doesn't hurt that it's a good-looking plant.

INGREDIENTS

- Licorice fern rhizomes
- Vodka
- Simple syrup

INSTRUCTIONS

Chop the rhizomes into small pieces, ¼ to ½ inch long. Measure the chopped rhizomes and combine with an equal amount of vodka in a jar. Place the jar somewhere out of direct sun and let steep for 3 weeks, shaking it once a day. Strain the vodka and discard the solids.

Measure the infused vodka and pour into a bottle or jar. Add half as much simple syrup as you have vodka. Shake well. Drink it alone, over ice, or in a Tree-Tini.

PICKING LICORICE FERN

In the landscape, licorice fern (*Polypodium glycyrrhiza*) takes root in mats of moss that grow on trees in the cool, humid climate of the Pacific Northwest. If you happen upon a big clump of licorice fern, break off a piece of rhizome and give it a chew. The flavor is sweet and bitter at the same time.

Licorice fern often grows in big clumps, but since you're taking the root of this plant, harvest conscientiously and don't remove more than 10 percent of the root mass at a time.

TREE-TINI

Prickly ash is sometimes called the toothache tree. One chew on a prickly ash fruit will tell you why. Your mouth will go numb and stay that way for several minutes. It's a little disconcerting, but temporary. Prickly ash is in the citrus family, a cousin of Sichuan pepper, which has a similar mouth-numbing effect.

Macerating the small prickly ash fruits in vodka gives you an infusion with the flavor and scent of prickly ash, but with 95 percent of the numbing power removed.

The flavor of licorice fern is both sweet and bitter. In a liqueur the sweetness dominates, but the underlying bitter is still there . . . lurking in the background, all mysterious and dressed in black, smoking a cigarette.

Licorice fern liqueur is mostly vodka, so this is a potent drink. Think of it as a licorice-flavored vodka martini with an aftertaste of numb.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces prickly ash vodka (below)
- **1** ounce licorice fern liqueur

TO MAKE THE PRICKLY ASH VODKA

To infuse the vodka, combine ¼ cup dried or 1 cup fresh prickly ash fruits with 2 cups vodka in a jar with a tight lid. Let it infuse for 3 days and then start tasting daily. When the tip of your tongue goes just a little numb a minute after you've taken a sip, you're there. Fascinating.

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the ingredients in a shaker full of ice and stir for 30 seconds. Strain into a martini glass.

PICKING PRICKLY ASH

Prickly ash trees (*Zanthoxylum* spp.) produce red berries in the fall. Pick the ripe berries and dry them in a dehydrator at 95°F until they split open. Remove the seeds and save the dried fruit to use as a spice. The prickly ash tree is well armed with sharp spines on its bark. Harvest with care!

LIMONCELLO

Limoncello is a classic Italian liqueur traditionally served icy cold as a digestif. The recipe comes from southern Italy and calls for true lemons (*Citrus* × *limon*), but I use Meyer lemons because I like the way they taste and I have access to a Meyer lemon tree. I've come up with two recipes that produce very different liqueurs. Both versions are vodka based, although you may use any neutral spirit. Keep the ABV under 50 percent; spirits that are more than 100 proof will overwhelm the flavor of the lemons.

The traditional method calls for using only the zest of the lemons. This is the fragrant, oily, yellow outer part of the lemon skin. The virtue of this method is that you can use the lemon flesh and juice for another recipe. The virtue of the nontraditional method, which calls for using the whole lemon, is that it's a lot less work, and who doesn't appreciate a time-saving recipe? In both methods, make sure your lemons are clean; wash them with a little mild soap and rinse very well.

As for which method is better, you'll have to decide that for yourself. The traditional method yields a prettier, clearer beverage. The lazy woman's method gives you a sweeter, less spirit-forward flavor, but the pectin from the seeds and pith make it more opaque. You can't go wrong with either one, because both are delicious: sweet, sour, and zingy.

METHOD NUMBER ONE

INGREDIENTS

- **10** Meyer lemons
- **4** cups vodka
- **2** cups water
- **1** cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Use a zester to remove the zest of the lemons, discarding the bitter white pith. Combine the lemon zest with the vodka in a jar, seal tightly, shake, and store in a dark place for about 2 weeks, shaking the jar once a day. Then taste. If the flavor isn't to your liking, let it go a little longer.

After the flavor meets with your approval, make a light syrup by combining the water and sugar in a saucepan over medium heat, whisking until the sugar dissolves; let it cool. Strain the vodka off the zest and combine it with the light syrup. (Store the zest in the freezer and use it to garnish various beverages or to flavor nocino). Pour the liquid through a coffee filter into bottles. Seal and store for 2 more weeks before drinking.

METHOD NUMBER TWO

INGREDIENTS

- **10** or so Meyer lemons, quartered
- **4** cups vodka
- **2** cups water
- **1** cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Fill a large jar with the lemon pieces (as many as you can fit in) and pour the vodka over them. Close the jar, shake, and store in a dark place for about 2 weeks, shaking the jar once a day. Then taste. If the flavor isn't to your liking, let it go a little longer.

Combine the water and sugar in a saucepan over medium heat, whisking until the sugar dissolves. Strain the lemons from the vodka and set the vodka aside. Put the lemons in the saucepan with the light syrup; bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and let simmer for 5 minutes, occasionally pressing on the lemons to release the last bit of juice. Remove from the heat and let the syrup cool, then combine with the vodka. Pour through a coffee filter into bottles. Seal and store for 2 more weeks before drinking.

Store limoncello in the freezer so it can be served ice cold without requiring actual ice, which would dilute the taste and silky texture of the beverage. The high alcohol content prevents it from freezing.

PICKING MEYER LEMONS

Technically, a Meyer lemon is not a true lemon; it's a hybrid of a lemon and a mandarin orange (*Citrus* × *meyeri*). As a result, the skin is thinner than that of a true lemon and the fruit is sweeter and less acidic. The ripe fruit is juicier and slightly rounder than true lemons, and when left to mature on the tree it takes on a rosy/orange tint.

Meyer lemons are hardy to USDA zone 9, but because the tree is relatively small and grows well in containers, it's a popular houseplant where winter temperatures get too low for it to overwinter outdoors. Fruit ripens year-round, but the heaviest harvest time is in winter.

WILD SANGRIA

Sangria is traditionally composed of red wine, fruit, sweetener, and brandy. Its origins are in Spain and Portugal, but all the world loves a nice glass of sangria. Served cold in pitchers or punch bowls, sangria is a great party drink, especially in summer when the fruit flavors and low alcohol content offer welcome refreshment.

Homemade blueberry wine gives this sangria a fruity base, and the limoncello gives the wine a boost of booze. (Despite the limoncello, the alcohol content of this punch is low relative to that of most cocktails.) Sweeten your sangria with a foraged simple syrup rather than plain sugar for an extra layer of flavor. Milkweed flower syrup, schisandra syrup, and sassafras twig syrup would all be tasty here.

I realize that not everyone will have blueberry wine on hand; it's fine to substitute a fruity red wine. The carbonated beverage is optional, but I like what the bubbles do for the punch. Use a flavored seltzer or a complementary fruit soda. Citrus goes well with blueberry; consider the San Pellegrino grapefruit, lemon, and orange flavors. Or perhaps a bottle of elderflower champagne.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** (750 ml) bottle blueberry wine
- ½ cup limoncello

- **½** cup simple syrup of your choice
- **½** cup mixed fruit (Juneberries, blueberries, black raspberries, et cetera)
- **2** cups carbonated beverage (optional)

TO MAKE 6 CUPS

Combine the wine, limoncello, and simple syrup in a 2-quart pitcher and stir well. Add the fruit, cover, and refrigerate for several hours. Immediately before serving, pour the wine mixture into a bowl or decorative pitcher, add the carbonated beverage, and stir gently to combine.

MAYWINE

Maywine is an infusion made by steeping sweet woodruff in white wine. Once used as a mattress stuffing, this plant is sometimes called lady's bedstraw. In Germany maywine is served to celebrate May Day. Maywine punch includes champagne and strawberries, which is tasty, but I suggest making a simple infusion to enjoy the herb on its own. Drying the herb before infusing it will concentrate the flavor of the woodruff and accentuate its lovely haylike scent, full of sweetness and vanilla.

INGREDIENTS

- **10–12** stems sweet woodruff, dried
- **1** (750 ml) bottle light white wine

INSTRUCTIONS

To dry the sweet woodruff stems, place them between two layers of paper towels. Heat them at full power in a microwave for 30 seconds, then check and continue to heat in 15-second intervals until the leaves are entirely dry. If you don't have a microwave, bake them in the oven at 250°F (120°C) for 5 minutes, or dry them in a dehydrator at 95°F (35°C) until they are brittle.

Pour off about 4 ounces of the wine to prevent spillage. Stuff the dried sweet woodruff down into the bottle, fully submerging it. Recork the bottle and let sit overnight. After 24 hours, refrigerate the bottle to chill the wine. When it's nicely chilled, strain out the herbs and serve the wine.

PICKING SWEET WOODRUFF

Often grown as a dainty ground cover in shady places, sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) has escaped cultivation and can be found in moist, slightly acidic soils. It can be gathered all season long, and while the flowers are also safe to use, they're not as flavorful as the leaves. Harvest sweet woodruff by snipping off the top few leaves, leaving the base of the plant in place to continue growing.

MULBERRY LIQUEUR

Makes 3–4 cups

Mulberries are an underappreciated fruit. I've read many descriptions of the flavor as mildly sweet and insipid — perhaps that's why so few people pick them — but I enjoy the flavor of mulberries, both fresh and dried. Drying concentrates the flavor and sweetness; I recommend using dried fruit in this recipe.

INGREDIENTS

- **½** cup dried mulberries
- **2** cups vodka
- Water
- Sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

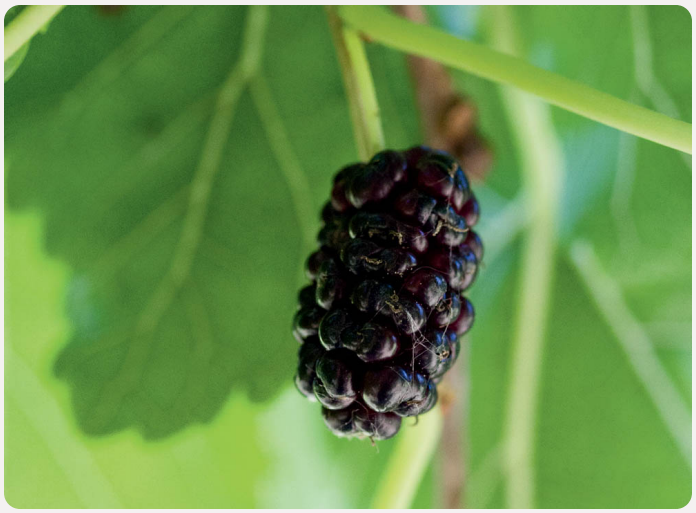
Combine the mulberries and the vodka in a jar with a tight lid. Shake well and let steep for 1 week. Then start tasting. The vodka should take on the color and flavor of the fruit. When you can taste the mulberries in the vodka, strain off the vodka and set it aside.

Measure the fruit and combine it with the water and sugar in a saucepan using a 1:1:1 ratio. Bring to a boil, whisking to dissolve the sugar. Reduce the heat and simmer for a minute or two, then turn off the heat, cover the syrup, and let it sit for 3 to 4

hours. Strain the syrup, measure, and combine with an equal amount of mulberry vodka. There you have it: mulberry liqueur!

PICKING MULBERRIES

Mulberries (*Morus*) ripen in early summer, and they'll let you know when they're ready to be harvested. If you have to pull a mulberry off the tree, it isn't ripe. Watch the ground for splattered berries, then look up. A ripe mulberry will fall into your hand at the slightest touch. Only then is it fully sweet, juicy, and ready to be eaten.



’ROUND THE MULBERRY BUSH

I confess, I have really wanted to feature my mulberry liqueur in a cocktail. I’ve used it as a supporting player in place of oloroso sherry, but it deserves its very own drink. In this concoction, the sweetness of the bourbon and that of the mulberry liqueur differ in depth and intensity, and the verjuice brings them together nicely. A smidge of Benedictine weaves in and out, adding a light herbal touch.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces bourbon
- **2** ounces mulberry liqueur
- **1** ounce verjuice
- ½ ounce Benedictine

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine all the ingredients in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a coupe.

NOCINO

Makes approximately 1 gallon

Nocino, a traditional Italian digestif made from unripe walnuts, has a pagan association with the summer solstice. Despite its Italian name, the liqueur originated among the Picts (a Celtic tribe from Scotland), who were known to become euphoric after drinking it. They harvested their green walnuts at the solstice and celebrated summer by drinking the previous year's brew. Legend has it that the Romans took the recipe for nocino back to Italy when they left Britain behind.

As the recipe became an Italian specialty, spices like cinnamon, vanilla, and cloves were added, but for this foraged version I suggest using a combination of wild spices. What you use will depend on what grows near you; feel free to experiment. Once it's ready, nocino can be served straight up or over ice, used in marinades, or poured over ice cream.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** pounds unripe walnuts, quartered
- **1** cup Meyer lemon zest strips (you can use the zest left over from making limoncello the traditional way)
- **½** cup chopped spruce tips
- **3** tablespoons crushed dried spicebush berries
- **1½** teaspoons chopped sassafras root

- **2–3** quarts Everclear 151
- Simple syrup

INSTRUCTIONS

Put all the foraged ingredients in a 1-gallon jar, stir to combine, and cover with the alcohol. Let steep for 40 days in a cool, dark place.

Strain out and discard the solids. Measure the liquid and combine with an equal amount of simple syrup. Let steep for 3 months.

Strain the alcohol through a fine coffee filter and pour into bottles. The dark brown nocino is ready to drink now, but its flavor will improve over the next 6 months.

PICKING BLACK WALNUTS

Black walnuts (*Juglans nigra*) are most plentiful near me, but you can use any kind of walnuts, as long as they are young enough not to have developed a hard shell beneath the green husk. They need to be soft enough that you can slice through them with a sharp knife. To test your walnuts for the right degree of ripeness, use a metal skewer or knitting needle. If you can push it through the entire nut with little or no resistance, you're good to go. Depending on where you live, the walnuts will be at the right stage in May or June.

Black walnut juice stains your hands, and the young nuts are quite juicy. Stains last for about a week, so wear latex gloves if you want to avoid the mark of the black walnut.

THE DUCATI

Even though nocino isn't the primary ingredient in this cocktail, its strong flavor makes it the headliner. Nocino is herbal and slightly bitter; it is balanced by the sweetness in the brandy and the mulberry liqueur. Don't be fooled by the sugar in each of these ingredients; this is a highly alcoholic cocktail.

I started out with more verjuice, thinking extra sour was required to balance all that boozy sweetness, but I was wrong. Balance isn't the same as equilibrium, and a balanced cocktail can be primarily sweet or primarily sour. The important thing is the relationship among the ingredients. Can you taste all the flavors, including the supporting players? Do you like it? If so, you've done it right. If not, you can tinker with the amounts. This is your cocktail, after all.

This drink reminded me of a sidecar, another brandy cocktail. Motorcycles have sidecars. Nocino sounds Italian. Ducati is an Italian motorcycle. Done.

INGREDIENTS

- **1½** ounces brandy (but not something super floral like Metaxa)
- ¾ ounce nocino
- ½ ounce mulberry liqueur
- ¼ ounce verjuice

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine all the ingredients in a shaker full of ice and stir for 30 seconds. Strain into a coupe.

MY MILKSHAKE

Don't be fooled by the name of this cocktail. Yes, there's ice cream in it, and that gives the drink some sweetness, but the primary flavors here are spicy, in a dark, mysterious, you-think-you-know-who-I-am-but-you-really-have-no-idea kind of way. That comes from both the rye and the nocino.

Rye is the base spirit, providing the treble notes. Think of it as the soprano in the chorale that is your cocktail. Nocino is a darkly spicy liqueur — I think of it as singing bass — and my foraged version has an extra boost of sassafras that broadens and brightens the bitterness of the black walnuts.

Folded into cream, the peppery flavor of spicebush shines through, and the ice cream sings the middle notes of this cocktail concert.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces rye whiskey
- **1** ounce nocino
- **2** teaspoons spicebush ice cream

TO MAKE SPICEBUSH ICE CREAM

If you have an ice cream maker, use your favorite vanilla ice cream recipe and add a tablespoon of ground spicebush berries for every pint of ice cream. If you don't have an ice cream maker, you can add the ground spicebush to already-made vanilla ice cream by scooping the ice cream out onto a cutting board, sprinkling on the ground spicebush, and folding the spice into the ice cream with two large spoons or paddles.

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the rye and nocino in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a glass. Top with the spicebush ice cream. Wait before taking your first sip. As the ice cream begins to melt, the combination of spiced cream and differently spiced booze is divine.

PINEAPPLE WEED LIQUEUR

Makes about 1 quart

I originally made this liqueur with the intention of using it as a mixer, but I can rarely bring myself to combine it with anything; it's superb on its own. As you lift the glass, the enticing scent of pineapple weed wafts up to your nose, helping you anticipate just how wonderful the flavor will be.

The depth of flavor in this liqueur comes from combining two infused liquids: a flower-infused spirit and a flower-infused syrup. Use in this double infusion technique for any delicate flower liqueur. The first time you taste this luscious liqueur, try it in a small glass with a single cube of ice; it's delicious enough to be dessert. Once you get to know the flavor, you may be inspired to play around with it in a cocktail or two.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** cups roughly chopped pineapple weed flowers and foliage
- **2** cups vodka
- **Up to 2** cups pineapple weed syrup (use the method for flower syrups)

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the chopped pineapple weed and the vodka in a glass jar, cover tightly, and shake well. Let steep in a cool, dark place for 2 to 3 days. Then open the jar and take a whiff. When the vodka smells strongly of pineapple, strain the liquid and measure it. Stir an equal amount of pineapple weed syrup into the flavored vodka to make liqueur.

Store this liqueur in a jar with a tight lid in the refrigerator. It will keep for 6 months.

PICKING PINEAPPLE WEED

Pineapple weed (*Matricaria discoidea*) is a common weed of poor soils, and it grows in a wide range of climates. Pineapple weed flowers aren't especially beautiful to look at. They are small, yellow-green, and have no petals. But who cares what they look like when they smell and taste this good? Crush a flower between your fingers, and you'll know immediately why this plant got its common name: the scent of pineapple is enticing.

Pineapple weed can be used in tea, fresh or dried, but sugar intensifies the pineapple flavor, making syrup the best way to preserve it. While some foragers suggest that you use only the flowers, the delicate foliage also has a pineapple flavor and scent. Using the entire stem also makes it easier to harvest, so why not?

THE ANTI-PIÑA COLADA

I have nothing against the piña colada. In fact, I've enjoyed many a piña colada on many a tropical beach and I kind of wish I were doing that right now, instead of huddling in front of a space heater writing about tropical flavors. But I digress.

Pineapple weed liqueur is one of my very favorite wild drinks, and that's saying something. As delicious as it is by itself, I kept thinking there might be a way to mix it up, literally. But the flavor of pineapple weed is so much more subtle and less acidic than that of true pineapple. I wouldn't want it to be trampled by a heavy coconut cream or an assertive whiskey. So what's light and tropical and goes with pineapple weed? Coconut water, of course.

This recipe is almost too simple to be called a recipe. But once you've tried it, I bet you'll keep coming back for more.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces pineapple weed liqueur
- **2** ounces coconut water

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the ingredients in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a coupe and enjoy, wondering how you lived this long without it.

SPICEBUSH DRAM

Makes approximately 2 cups

Cinnamon and nutmeg are the spices most commonly used in cocktails. Both have strong, warm flavors, and both grow in tropical climates, so many of us can't forage for them. Fortunately, there's an equally delicious and not dissimilar spice that grows in temperate climates: spicebush berry, which has a flavor that's equal parts sweetness and piquancy. It's tasty in a syrup or infused directly in alcohol. Spicebush dram is a great way to introduce just a hint of warm spiciness (along with some rum) into a cocktail.

In bar lingo, a "dram" can mean several things. It may refer specifically to ⅛ fluid ounce or, more likely, to a shot of whiskey. It's also sometimes used to refer generally to a small drink, as in "Shall we have a wee dram?" (To which the answer is always yes.)

Spicebush dram is my foraged take on allspice dram, a highly spiced, rum-based liqueur originally made in Jamaica. It is traditionally used in tiki drinks to add depth and complexity to the fruit base. Frankly, I think spicebush dram is tasty enough to be appreciated on its own, with a wee splash of seltzer.

INGREDIENTS

- ¼ cup dried spicebush berries
- 1 cup light rum

- **¾** cup brown sugar
- **1½** cups water

INSTRUCTIONS

Using a mortar and pestle or a spice grinder, roughly grind the berries. You don't want a fine powder; you want little chunks of dried spice. Pour the ground berries into a pint-size mason jar or other container that can be sealed tightly. Add the rum and close the jar tightly. Set the brew aside to macerate for 2 weeks; shake it daily.

Strain the rum through a mesh strainer and then again through a coffee filter. This gives you a clear dram.

Combine the brown sugar and the water in a saucepan. Bring to a simmer and whisk to dissolve the sugar. Let the syrup cool, then combine with the rum and pour into bottles. Set the bottles aside for at least 1 week before tasting; 2 weeks is even better.

Try a sip (or two) over ice to get a feel for the flavor of the spicebush and rum. Then feel free to play around with using the dram to flavor whatever combination appeals to your palate.

PICKING SPICEBUSH BERRIES

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) is a generous plant. In early spring it delights us with plentiful, delicate yellow flowers, before the leaves emerge. In fall the leaves turn a bright, rich yellow . . . again, a feast for the eyes. When the leaves fall, they reveal the best part of this plant: bright red berries that can be used fresh or dried.

Spicebush is a dioecious plant, which means male and female flowers are borne on separate plants. Needless to say, the females are the moneymakers in the spicebush community. Although at least a few males are necessary. I suppose.

THE PIRATE KING

This cocktail is named after Elizabeth Swann, of *Pirates of the Caribbean* fame. Beautiful, strong, and brave, Elizabeth ruled as the pirate king, despite her undeniable femininity. While pirates are traditionally associated with rum, this cocktail is built around a single-malt Scotch whisky that is finished in a rum cask, after its initial aging in a traditional bourbon cask. The remnants of the rum add just an edge of spice and sweetness to the whisky.

In keeping with the Caribbean theme, I've also used spicebush dram, a foraged version of allspice dram. Allspice dram is sometimes called pimento dram, but it's not named after the olive stuffing. That would be ridiculous. Pimento and Jamaican pepper are alternate names for allspice.

INGREDIENTS

- **3** ounces Balvenie Caribbean Cask
- **1½** ounces spicebush dram
- **1** ounce wild ginger syrup
- Lime wedge
- **2** ounces seltzer (optional)

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the whisky, spicebush dram, and ginger syrup in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into an old-fashioned glass. Squeeze the lime into the drink and give it a stir. Lime garnish is optional.

I'm someone who drinks her whisky neat, and I prefer this cocktail sans seltzer. If that's too strong for your taste, top off with the seltzer.

Let's all toast the Pirate King!

VIN DE PÊCHE

Makes 1 quart

Vin de pêche is French for “peach wine,” but this isn’t peach wine in the obvious sense. It’s a wine infused with peach leaf, a tradition that originated in Provence, where people appreciate a refreshing beverage. The tender young leaves add an irresistible almond flavor. I like to sip it over ice as a cool summer aperitif. Peach leaf wine will keep for a year in the refrigerator.

INGREDIENTS

- **50** young, fresh peach leaves
- **1** (750 ml) bottle fruity wine (red, rosé, or white)
- ¼ cup brandy or cognac
- ¼ cup sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

Rinse off the leaves, put them in a quart jar, and add the rest of the ingredients. Mix it all together and let steep on the counter for 2 weeks, shaking daily. By this time the wine should have a strong almond flavor. If you’re satisfied with it, strain out the leaves and discard them. If the almond flavor isn’t strong enough, let the leaves sit in the wine for a few more days, until you’re happy with the taste.

PICKING PEACH LEAVES

Leaves from peach trees (*Prunus persica*) should be harvested in late spring to early summer. They should be full sized but flexible, rather than leathery. Of course, you must be sure your peach leaves haven't been sprayed with anything toxic. If you're foraging in the wild, this is probably a safe bet, but wash them anyway.

SPRUCE TIP VODKA

Makes 1 quart

Spruce tips are full of vitamin C, and macerated in vodka they give the spirit a light, citrus flavor. Be sure to check the flavor regularly as it develops. Left too long, the resulting infusion tastes more like Pine-Sol than a cocktail.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** cup feathery young spruce tips (see Picking Spruce Tips)
- **1** (750 ml) bottle vodka

INSTRUCTIONS

Place the spruce tips in a blender and add just enough vodka to cover them. Blend on high until the spruce is completely pulverized, then pour the green liquid into a quart jar and top off with the rest of the vodka.

Seal the jar, shake the vodka, and put it somewhere dark to steep. Taste it after 2 days. You want a nice lemony taste, and depending on how old your spruce tips are, this may take 2 to 4 days.

When you like the flavor, strain off the vodka, throw away the spruce tips (thank you, spruce tips), and reseal the vodka in the quart jar.

THE MERRY WOODSMAN

Back when transatlantic travel involved months at sea (rather than a TSA pat down), sailors often got scurvy due to a lack of vitamin C in their diet. I hesitate to outline scurvy's symptoms here since this is supposed to be appetizing. Let's just say it ends with death.

Native Americans used local evergreen foliage, which contains vitamin C, to prevent scurvy during winter months without fresh food. They shared this knowledge with European sailors, who added spruce tips to their beer for medicinal value.

I appreciate the evergreen needles more for their bright, citrusy flavor than their preventative properties. In this cocktail, their tartness is balanced by the sweetness of elderflowers and the spiciness of wild ginger. The Merry Woodsman captures the essence of a woodland spring, when a walk through the woods reveals all three plants at their flavorful best.

INGREDIENTS

- **3** ounces spruce tip vodka
- **1½** ounces spruce tip syrup
- ¾ ounce elderflower liqueur
- **1½** teaspoons wild ginger syrup
- **1½** ounces seltzer
- Young spruce tips, for garnish (optional)

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the vodka, spruce tip syrup, elderflower liqueur, and ginger syrup in a shaker full of ice and shake hard for 30 seconds. Strain into a highball glass, top with seltzer, and garnish with a young spruce tip, if desired.

WILD STRAWBERRY SHRUB

Makes 1 1/2–2 cups

In terms of beverages, a shrub is a vinegar-based drink that can be enjoyed on its own or used in cocktails. In colonial days shrubs were a popular way to preserve fruit. Combining fruit with sugar and vinegar creates an environment that's hostile to bacteria, so the fruit could be enjoyed well after its season even in an era when mechanical refrigeration didn't exist.

Before you wrinkle up your nose in distaste at the idea of drinking vinegar (you know who you are), give shrubs a chance. You'll probably be pleasantly surprised. Mix a few tablespoons with seltzer (or something stronger!) for a refreshing beverage, use it in a glaze for meat or fish, or swirl it into yogurt.

Wild strawberry shrub is a great way to preserve the harvest and enjoy the bright, sweet, deep flavor of wild strawberries all year long. Let your shrub age for at least 6 months before using it in a cocktail. The mellowing makes it a more versatile ingredient.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** cup strawberries (or any fruit of your choice)
- **1** cup sugar
- **1** cup apple cider vinegar

INSTRUCTIONS

While you can easily make a shrub in an hour on the stove top, a cold-processed shrub better preserves the bright colors and flavors of the fruit. It's actually less work on your part, but it takes a little more time.

Mash the strawberries in a nonreactive bowl. (This recipe works well for many fruits; if you use a fruit with a protective skin — plums, peaches, cherries — cut the fruit into rough chunks and remove the pits.) Add the sugar and mix well. Cover the bowl and refrigerate.

Check the bowl the next day, and you'll see strawberries swimming in juice. The sugar draws the juice out of the fruit without the application of heat. (Both sugar and water are polar molecules, and their opposite attractions bind the sugar to the water in the fruit, drawing the water out of the fruit's flesh.) Give the mixture a stir and refrigerate for another 24 hours.

The next day, strain the fruit from the liquid. Press the fruit against the inside of the strainer to remove as much juice as possible. Combine the juice with the vinegar and whisk it together well to dissolve any sugar. Pour the resulting liquid into a glass bottle or canning jar, cover, and refrigerate.

A freshly made shrub will be both strongly tart and strongly sweet. You can use it right away or let it mellow over the next few weeks. If this is your first shrub experiment, I suggest you taste it at intervals, to become familiar with how the flavor changes over time.

A tightly sealed jar of shrub will keep for 6 to 12 months in the refrigerator.

PICKING WILD STRAWBERRIES

On the East Coast the season for wild strawberries (*Fragaria vesca, F. virginiana*) is woefully short. You'll see them in May or June, depending on where you forage, and you're lucky if you find a handful to eat on the spot. (Humans aren't the only animals who appreciate a ripe wild strawberry.)

In the Rocky Mountains, however, wild strawberry season is astonishingly long and extends into August. That alone increases the possibility of a good harvest, but for some reason I've also found much greater quantities of wild strawberries in the Rockies. Chalk it up to the altitude or the sunlight, I don't really care. All I know is that wild strawberries make store-bought berries taste like an entirely different (and inferior) fruit. And yes, a wild strawberry is even better than a warm, perfectly ripe fruit plucked from your own backyard. No disrespect intended.

RUM AGROUND

I tested this recipe with varying amounts of shrub and rum, then both with and without the acorn orgeat. There's no doubt that the orgeat makes this drink. Without it, the vinegar is too sharp and not integrated with the sweet rum. For someone just beginning to use orgeat, this recipe shows exactly what it can do for a cocktail. More than plain simple syrup, the nuttiness of the acorn syrup provides support and balance for the drink.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces white rum
- **1** ounce strawberry shrub
- ½ ounce acorn orgeat

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine all the ingredients in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a champagne coupe.

Foraged Fermentation

Fermentation (as far as alcohol production is concerned) is the process whereby yeasts break down sugars into alcohol. Beer brewers and winemakers usually add commercial yeasts to their recipes for controlled results. Foragers, however, are more inclined to make use of naturally occurring yeasts, since we appreciate the spontaneity, risk, and excitement of the natural world. You never know exactly how it's going to turn out, and that's part of the fun.

Wild yeasts can be found in many places: on the skins of fruits, in flower pollens, and in flower nectars. Until recently, fruit growers believed the white bloom on many fruits (like grapes, plums, and elderberries) was wild yeast. It is now understood that the bloom is a natural waxy coating that prevents moisture loss. If you don't believe me (or if you've seen all the outdated, inaccurate information on the Internet),

perhaps you'll believe the University of California at Davis's viticulture program. I do.

Most fruit skins are covered with yeast — we just can't see them. There are also wild yeasts in the air around us. So chopping up fruit, adding a little sugar, and exposing it to the air is often enough to get fermentation started.

Foragers are inclined to make use of naturally occurring yeasts, since we appreciate the spontaneity, risk, and excitement of the natural world.

ELDERFLOWER CHAMPAGNE

Makes 1 gallon

Elderflower champagne ferments naturally, thanks to the yeasts in the elderflower pollen. There's no need to add commercial yeast, although you can if your brew doesn't start fermenting on its own within a few days. Since rain washes away pollen, it's best to harvest elderflowers after several days of dry weather. Flowers harvested during a rainy season may not have enough pollen or yeast for fermentation.

I love the light, bubbly flavor of elderflower champagne all on its own or mixed with a floral gin in a Happy Birthday, Leda. I wish I could drink this all year round, but since it contains no preservatives that isn't possible. And perhaps that's one reason it's so very special.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** gallon water
- **1½** pounds sugar
- **3** lemons
- **6–8** large elderflower clusters
- **2** tablespoons white or apple cider vinegar

INSTRUCTIONS

Bring 3 quarts of water to a rolling boil in a large pot, then remove from the heat and let cool to room temperature. Bring the remaining quart of water to a boil in a saucepan, then remove from the heat, add the sugar, and stir to dissolve. Pour the liquid into a clean, nonreactive bucket (e.g., plastic or stainless steel) and let cool to room temperature.

Slice the lemons very thinly and add them to the cooled sugar syrup, along with the 3 quarts of cooled water, the elderflower clusters, and the vinegar. Stir well, then drape a clean dishcloth over the bucket and set it in a warm spot to ferment for 4 to 5 days, stirring once a day. After several days you should notice little bubbles on the surface of the brew and fizziness when you stir.

Collect four 1-liter plastic soda bottles and rinse and sterilize them. To sterilize, you can use a commercial sanitizer like One Step (if you're a homebrewer), or you can use bleach: pour 2 teaspoons of bleach into each bottle, fill the bottle halfway with water, shake it around a lot, empty, and rinse thoroughly.

After 4 to 5 days, strain the fermented elderflower liquid through a jelly bag, then pour it into the sterilized bottles. Leave a few inches of headspace at the top of each bottle and screw on the tops firmly. Squeeze the bottles to get a sense of how much give they have and then store them in a cool, dark place for 1 week.

As the liquid ferments in the bottle, it produces carbon dioxide, which builds up pressure in the bottles and forces the gas to dissolve in the liquid. The pressurized gas will be released as champagne-like fizzy bubbles when the bottle is opened.

Check the bottles every day or so, gently squeezing their sides. After 3 to 7 days (depending on the temperature where the champagne is stored) the bottles will feel rock hard, with no give at all beneath your fingers. Now they are ready to be drunk! You can either move them to the refrigerator to stop the fermentation (and this beverage is best chilled) or store them in a cool, dry location if you don't have room in your fridge.

Elderflower champagne lasts for about 2 months in the refrigerator. Unrefrigerated bottles need to be checked every few days, as pressure will continue to build as the bottles sit. Since the fateful day when a couple of exploding bottles jolted me out of a sound sleep, I loosen the caps of my elderflower champagne bottles once a week to let a little gas bleed out — just a crack so I can hear the gas escape for about 3 seconds. After I tighten the cap, I can once again feel a little give in the bottle. After a week the bottle is rock hard again and I repeat the process.

PICKING ELDERFLOWERS

Elderflowers (*Sambucus* spp.) ripen in late spring to early summer, and the more pollen on the flowers, the tastier your flowers will be. Select umbels with fully opened flowers and snip off the flower umbels whole. Remove any insects by hand. Don't shake or wash the flowers, or you'll remove the pollen. Before using your elderflowers, discard the large stems and any brown blossoms. It's fine to leave the tiny little stems attached to each flower, but larger stems and dead flowers may produce an off flavor.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, LEDA

Sometimes you open the refrigerator door and realize that you have exactly what you need to make a perfect seasonal cocktail. My friend Leda's birthday is in early August, and back when we both lived in NYC I made her this cocktail to celebrate. The elderflower champagne I had bottled in June was nice and bubbly, and the wineberries were just starting to ripen in Central Park.

You can substitute any brambleberries in this recipe (black raspberries, raspberries, and blackberries are all delicious). I love how the vibrant color of the berries shines through the pale yellow combination of gin, elderflower champagne, and elderflower liqueur. The lime garnish intensifies the slightly tangy flavor of the berries and adds some nice color contrast.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** tablespoon brambleberries
- **2** ounces dry gin
- ½ ounce elderflower liqueur (below), or St-Germain
- Elderflower champagne
- Lime wedge, for garnish

TO MAKE ELDERFLOWER LIQUEUR

If you'd like to make your own elderflower liqueur rather than use a commercial brand like St-Germain, fill a quart jar with ripe elderflower clusters and cover them with 80 proof vodka. Flowers exposed to the air will oxidize, which won't affect the flavor but will make a darker liqueur. Tightly close the jar and leave the flowers to infuse for a month, out of direct sun. After 30 days, strain out and discard the solids. Measure the vodka, and set it aside.

Most elderflower liqueur is 40 proof, so to turn your infused vodka into a lower alcohol liqueur, combine equal parts 80 proof vodka infusion and simple syrup. To estimate how much simple syrup you'll need, remember that one cup of sugar and one cup of water make approximately 1 ½ cups simple syrup. If you have 2 cups of infused vodka, make a syrup with 1 ½ cups sugar and 1 ½ cups water. That should work out just about right.

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Gently muddle the berries in a pint glass, then fill the glass with ice. Add the gin and elderflower liqueur and stir with a

bar spoon for 30 seconds. Top with champagne and garnish with a wedge of lime.

GRAPEFRUIT-MUGWORT SODA

Makes 1 1/2–2 quarts

Sana Ashraf (who created The Primitive Paloma cocktail recipe that follows) began her cocktail experiment with a homemade soda. The flavors of the soda led her to riff on the paloma cocktail, and the results are delicious.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** cups sugar
- **3** cups warm water
- Juice of 3 grapefruits
- **4** cups mugwort leaves

INSTRUCTIONS

This soda should be allowed to just begin to ferment; you're doing it for the carbonation, not for the alcohol. Combine the sugar, warm water, and grapefruit juice in a half-gallon jar. Stir or shake to dissolve the sugar. Add the mugwort leaves and poke them under the liquid so they are completely submerged. Cover the jar with a clean dish towel and set it on your counter to ferment, stirring once a day.

After 3 to 5 days you should notice bubbles when you stir. This is the beginning of fermentation. Continue to stir once a day and start tasting. When the soda is nice and bubbly, strain out the solids and set them aside. Pour the soda into sterilized 1-liter plastic bottles, leaving several inches of headspace at the top. Leave the bottles at room temperature for 2 days, checking the carbonation level once a day by giving them a quick burp (see Elderflower Champagne). When they are fully carbonated, move the bottles to the refrigerator to stop fermentation.

Spread the solids (grapefruit pulp and mugwort leaves) on a dehydrator sheet and dry until they're brittle. These can be ground as needed and combined with salt to rim a Primitive Paloma.

In the refrigerator, the soda will keep fresh for a few weeks.

PICKING MUGWORT

Mugwort (*Artemesia vulgaris*) may well be one of the most hated weeds in the landscape. It's an aggressive grower, so feel free to harvest in quantity. You couldn't eradicate this plant if you tried. Young, tender leaves are best for this recipe, and both the leaves and the roots are a useful bitters ingredient.

THE PRIMITIVE PALOMA

Guest Mixologist: Sana Ashraf

Sana Ashraf, a transplant from the United Arab Emirates by way of Pakistan, has spent the last few years exploring her lifelong love of gastronomy and mixology, along with her newfound passion for aromatherapy, foraging, and herbalism. She finds inspiration both in tradition and in the chaos of the world around her.

Sana lives on a large, relatively untended property on Long Island where she has enjoyed discovering a range of wild edibles. Her first experiment with foraged mixology was making nocino from unripe black walnuts. She devised this clever take on the traditional paloma when her landlord's landscapers showed up to mow and blow. She rushed ahead of their machines, grabbing great handfuls of mugwort, a weed they disparaged but that she knew had value.

Mugwort has a deep, earthy flavor. Asian cultures have long appreciated it in both savory (soups and noodles) and sweet (filled mochi pastries) dishes. Here it adds a strong herbal taste that balances the tart grapefruit and sharp blanco tequila. As a forager, herbalist, and all around DIY-er, Sana made her own grapefruit-mugwort soda to replace the commercial grapefruit soda (Fresca or Squirt, for example) used in a traditional paloma. She also used mugwort in the

special salt blend, combining it with dehydrated boozy grapefruit pulp and rimming the glass.

INGREDIENTS

- Mugwort/grapefruit-infused salt
- **2½** ounces blanco tequila, ice cold
- **1½** ounces fresh lime juice
- **4** ounces grapefruit-mugwort soda
- Lime wedge, for garnish

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Coat half the rim of a collins glass with lime juice and the mugwort/grapefruit-infused salt. Combine the tequila and lime juice in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into the collins glass and add the grapefruit soda, then garnish with a lime wedge.

TO MAKE MUGWORT-INFUSED BLANCO TEQUILA

I strongly recommend fermenting your own soda, but as an alternative, you can infuse blanco tequila with mugwort, then use a commercial grapefruit soda to bring in the citrus flavor. To infuse the tequila, combine ¼ cup dried or 1 cup fresh mugwort leaves with 2 cups tequila. The strength of your herb will determine how long you let the tequila steep, but it will be somewhere between 2 and 5 days. When the tequila has taken on a noticeable mugwort flavor, strain and bottle the liquid. It will last indefinitely; no refrigeration required.

TO MAKE THE SALT RIM

Sana's favorite thing about this cocktail is making the herb salt blend for the rim by dehydrating the fermentation scraps, mixing them with salt, and using the final product to rim the glass, resulting in zero waste. If you've fermented your own grapefruit-mugwort soda, pulse one part fermentation scraps, including the dried grapefruit solids, with two parts salt in a spice grinder to combine.

If you're using commercial grapefruit soda, combine one part dried mugwort leaves with two parts salt. I recommend splurging on a high-quality brand like San Pellegrino, but if you love the flavor combination, try making your own. It's even more delicious that way.

BRAMBLEBERRY LIQUEUR

Makes 2–2 1/2 cups

This liqueur is sweet and syrupy, with a concentrated berry flavor. It's a delicious after-dinner drink served over ice or with a splash of seltzer. You might also drizzle it over some vanilla ice cream. Any brambleberry (blackberry, raspberry, wineberry) will work, but my favorite is black raspberry.

INGREDIENTS

- **1** quart brambleberries
- **1** cup boiling water
- **1** cup sugar
- Commercial wine or bread yeast, if needed

INSTRUCTIONS

In a large bowl, use a potato masher to crush the berries. Add the boiling water and stir to combine. Cover the bowl with a dish towel and leave it on your kitchen counter for a day, stirring several times. The repeated stirring aerates the brew and also prevents unwanted, oxygen-dependent bacteria from colonizing the surface of your liquid.

Strain the juice through a jelly bag into a large bowl. Discard the pulp. Add the sugar to the juice and whisk to combine. Leave the bowl out on the counter, covered with a dish towel, for 2 days, stirring several times a day. The dish towel will keep solids out but allow air in. After a few days you should notice a slight fizzing when you stir the liquid. If you don't, add a pinch of wine or bread yeast to get the fermentation started.

Once active fermentation has begun, strain the liquid through a jelly bag one more time and then pour into clean glass or plastic bottles. Fasten a latex glove to the top of each bottle with an elastic band and prick one pin hole in one finger of each glove. This allows gases to escape during fermentation while preventing anything from getting into the bottle, contaminating the liqueur. You'll notice that the glove inflates during the most active part of fermentation. When the glove deflates, which may take up to 2 months, it's safe to cap or cork your bottles. Premature corking can result in exploding bottles, so don't rush it!

Brambleberry liqueur will last
indefinitely; no refrigeration needed.

Foraged Distillation

There is one foraged cocktail ingredient you can legally distill at home, even in the United States, and that's flower petal

water. Since no alcohol is involved and no still is required (because yes, merely possessing an unregistered still in the United States puts you at risk of paying a $10,000 fine and receiving a 5-year jail sentence), you can make your own flower waters.

DISTILLING ROSE WATER

Many essential oils are steam volatile, including those found in rose petals. That means that steam emanating from or passing through the petals carries with it the essential oils, which themselves carry the scent and flavor of the petals. This easy distillation method requires no special equipment. Be sure to use organically grown flowers and to collect the petals when they are absolutely fresh. If you're foraging in the wild, it's likely the petals you've gathered haven't been sprayed with anything nasty. If you're foraging from a friend's backyard (with permission, of course), take a minute to confirm that no chemicals have been used on the flowers.

Set a large pasta pot or water bath canner on your stove top and place a small ovenproof dish upside down in the middle of the pot. Remove the petals from your roses and measure them, then spread them around the bottom of the pot, circling the small ovenproof dish. You'll want 4 to 6 cups of rose petals.

Next, add water equal in volume to that of the rose petals to the pot. The water level should not be higher than the top of the inverted ovenproof dish at the center. Place a widemouth 2-cup measuring cup or other heat-proof bowl on top of the inverted dish. Cover the pot with the lid upside down. Turn on the heat.

As soon as the water begins to boil, reduce the heat and keep the liquid at a low simmer. At this point, place a bag of ice cubes on top of the inverted pot lid.

Here's how it works: As the water boils and turns to steam, it volatilizes the essential oils in the rose petals. That steam rises, and when it hits the ice-cooled, inverted lid of the pot, it condenses. The inverted lid funnels the water to the center, where it drips into the measuring cup. And the condensed water contains the fragrance and taste of the rose petals.

Check the rose petals every 15 minutes. The most concentrated fragrance and flavor will be gleaned during the first 20 to 40 minutes; the rose water will become more diluted over time. After 40 minutes the petals will have lost their color and it's time to stop boiling. Let everything cool, then pour the rose water into a jar or bottle. You should be able to get about 1 cup of rose water from 4 to 6 cups of rose petals. The rose water will keep in the refrigerator for up to 6 months.

CHAPTER FIVE

Backyard Bitters

Bitters are both one of the most essential cocktail components and one of the most confusing. They are also one of the most fun to make from foraged ingredients. You can play around and experiment in a mad scientist, tasty chemistry project kind of way. But before you get started, please allow me to manage your expectations. You must understand that 100 percent foraged bitters will not taste the same as commercially manufactured bitters, for the simple reason that commercial bitters are based on extremely bitter components — gentian root, cinchona bark, or quassia root, for example — that most of us cannot forage for.

Though I cannot find any of those things where I live, I *can* forage for several common, plentiful, bitter ingredients that are easy to identify and locate. And while they may not be as bitter as the commercial ingredients, they are still worth using and produce very nice bitters.

Which raises the question, why should you use bitters? What do bitters do and how do they do it?

Better with Bitters

Don't let the name throw you. While bitters may taste truly bitter on their own, in a cocktail they don't take center stage. That doesn't mean they're not essential. You wouldn't serve most food without a little salt, and bitters work a similar magic, pulling everything together, accenting a cocktail without stealing the show.

You'll hear people toss around words like "complexity" and "balance" when discussing bitters. Adding bitters to a sweet drink doesn't drastically change the flavor of the drink. It just mutes the sweetness ever so slightly, allowing other flavors to shine through. For example, without a few drops of bitters, the Ume No Hana is merely sweet and pleasant. Add bitters and you've got something complex and special. Why don't you try it yourself? Do a side-by-side taste test with a familiar cocktail recipe that calls for bitters. Try one with and one without and you'll see what I mean.

UME NO HANA

I was foraging on a rainy road trip in Denver when I smelled wild plum blossoms (*ume no hana* in Japanese) for the first time. The perfume was so intense that I knew it had to be captured in a cocktail.

When you're foraging on the road you have to fly by the seat of your pants; I didn't have much kitchen equipment with me back at the motel. Fortunately, the plum blossom flavor and perfume were strong enough to be captured in vodka alone. Many flowers benefit from a dual infusion process that uses sugar first. Rather than pass up the fragrant flowers, I went with what I had and filled a quart jar with clean flowers, then added vodka. No measuring, no recipe, just down-and-dirty booze infusion.

Two days later, when I got back to my kitchen, I opened the jar and was instantly transported right back to that rainy park. The scent and taste were amazing. I strained the liquid, measured it, and combined it with an equal amount of simple syrup to make the plum blossom liqueur.

Plum blossoms seem quintessentially Japanese, even when they're in Denver. Sparkling sake was a natural choice to balance the sweetness of the liqueur, and the verjuice adds a whisper of acidity. Bitters are the finishing touch. Without them the cocktail is merely sweet and floral. With them it's a glass full of wind, rain, and plum blossoms.

INGREDIENTS

- **2** ounces plum blossom liqueur
- ¼ ounce verjuice
- **2** ounces sparkling sake
- Licorice fern bitters

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the plum blossom liqueur and verjuice in a shaker full of ice and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a rocks glass and top with the sparkling sake. Shake on 4 or 5 drops of bitters. (If you're substituting commercial bitters, use only 1 or 2 drops.)

Building Your Bitters

When we talk about making bitters, we use volume measurements (fluid ounces) for the liquid and weight measurements (ounces) for the solids. Yes, it's a little weird, but that's the industry standard. The ratio is 4:1 (alcohol:plant parts) for dried plants and 2:1 (alcohol:plant parts) for fresh or frozen. Remember, dried plant parts have more concentrated flavors because the water has been removed, so you'll need less of them. Water and alcohol extract different flavors and compounds from plants, which is why we use both liquids.

Do you have to be so precise? No. You can just stuff a jar full of wild spicebush berries and pour vodka over them, but

without taking careful measurements you won't be able to reproduce your fabulous successes or avoid repeating your dismal failures. So let's start with accurate measurements and you can always freestyle once you get comfortable.

Commercial bitters often have long lists of ingredients, but I suggest you start simple with your own bitters, to get a handle on what each ingredient brings to the party. Where and when you forage will define your ingredient choices. Start with one plant from each of the three primary categories (bitter, spice, and fruit) and decide whether you'll be using the plant parts fresh or dried. (See Bitter Combinations, for some ideas to get you started.)

When composing a bitters recipe, at least half of the plant material you use should be bitter. If you're starting with 1 cup of alcohol (and we'll get to which alcohol in a minute), that's 8 ounces, by volume, of liquid. That means you'll need either 2 ounces total (by weight) of dried plant parts or 4 ounces total (by weight) of fresh. Of those plant parts, you'll need either 1 ounce of dried bitter ingredients or 2 ounces of fresh bitter ingredients.

It's perfectly alright to combine dried and fresh (or frozen) ingredients. Just remember that you'll always use twice as much fresh as dried when building your bitters.

The remainder of the plant material should be split between a fruit and a spice. This can be divided evenly, or, if one ingredient has a stronger flavor than the other (a strong spice and a mild fruit, a mild spice and a strong fruit), you might use more of one and less of another to create a balanced bitters.

1 cup alcohol
1 ounce dried bitter ingredient (2 ounces fresh)
1 ounce dried fruit/spice ingredients (2 ounces fresh)
bitters

ABV vs. Proof

ABV is the abbreviation for alcohol by volume. The ABV of a spirit is one-half of its designated proof. For example, vodka that is 100 proof is 50 percent alcohol by volume.

Most bitters recipes suggest starting with a neutral grain spirit (like Everclear or vodka) so as not to interfere with the flavors of the plants. But spirits with more pronounced flavors (like rye or rum) also make wonderful bitters, adding their flavor profile to the final product.

Everclear 151 is my macerating alcohol of choice. It's neutral in flavor, and because it has an ABV of 75 percent it simplifies the math. Commercial bitters are usually between 35 and 45 percent ABV. With Everclear 151, when it's time to dilute your bitters to the appropriate ABV, just add an equal amount of water-based solution and there you are at 37.5 percent. If you've used a 100-proof spirit, you'll have to do a little math. For every ounce of 100-proof alcohol, add a ounce of water-based solution. This will give you a final ABV of 40 percent.

Some mixologists build their bitters by infusing plants individually, then combining them into a final product. The reason for this is that different plants infuse at different strengths and speeds. Making individual infusions allows the

mixologist to tinker with the balance with great precision. That being said, I prefer to infuse my foraged plants together, allowing them to develop a complexity of flavor that deepens over time. Feel free to play around as you get more comfortable with the process.

Okay, enough talk! Let's make some bitters.

Step 1: Macerate in Alcohol

Put your plant parts in a glass jar, then pour in the base spirit. Seal tightly. Store the mixture out of direct light and give it a shake at least once a day. After 3 weeks, taste the spirit. If it's strongly flavored, strain out the solids and set them aside. If the flavor is still weak, continue to macerate for another week.

Step 2: Decoct in Water

Measure the strained alcohol solution and hold it in reserve. Measure out twice as much water as you have alcohol. Combine that water in a saucepan with the solids you strained from the alcohol. Bring this mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and let the liquid sit, covered, overnight.

The next morning, strain out and discard the solids. Measure the infused liquid, return it to the saucepan over medium heat, and for each c cup of liquid, add 1 teaspoon of sugar. Whisk to combine, then remove from the heat and let the liquid cool.

Step 3: Combine and Taste

Combine your alcohol maceration and your water decoction in the proportions needed to bring the ABV to between 35 and 45 percent, as described previously. Taste the result. Remember, you're not aiming for something that is palatable on its own. Straight bitters will be herbal, highly alcoholic, and, well, bitter. If you need a signpost, something to show you what you're aiming for, try a drop or two of straight Angostura bitters. Your homemade batch won't be as strongly bitter, but you'll see what I mean about this being an unusual, not fully palatable flavor on its own. Bitters are meant to be used in conjunction with something else (a cocktail, a glass of seltzer) and should be composed with this future blending in mind. The magic is in the mixing.

LICORICE FERN BITTERS

INGREDIENTS

- **8** ounces Everclear 151
- **1** ounce dried devil's club root
- **1** ounce fresh or frozen licorice root
- **1** ounce fresh or frozen Oregon grapes

SUMAC BITTERS

INGREDIENTS

- **8** ounces Everclear 151
- **1** ounce chopped dried dandelion root
- **1** ounce fresh or frozen crab apples
- **½** ounce dried sumac berries

BITTER COMBINATIONS

After you've made your first foraged bitters, you'll find yourself dreaming of different combinations. Each season and each place you forage offers up new flavors and new possibilities. Here are some combinations you might use as jumping-off points in your backyard bitters adventure, using different spirits as the base.

Neutral Grain–Based Bitters

THE BITTER	THE SPICE	THE FRUIT
dandelion root	sumac berries	silverberries
barberry root	sassafras root	cornelian cherries
juniper berries	lavender buds	crab apples
California bay nuts	schisandra berries	flowering quince fruit

Rum-Based Bitters

THE BITTER	THE SPICE	THE FRUIT
yellow dock root	wild ginger rhizomes	elderberries
black walnut leaf	pequin chiles	chokeberries
yarrow root	bee balm leaves	Juneberries

Rye- and Whiskey-Based Bitters

THE BITTER	THE SPICE	THE FRUIT
burdock root	spicebush berries	blackberries
devil’s club root	licorice fern root	Oregon grapes
mugwort root	pink peppercorns	Japanese knotweed stems

SUMAC SACRIFICE

If you've never tasted mezcal, try a sip before using it in cocktails. Like a heavily peated Scotch, mezcal has a distinctive flavor that tends to polarize drinkers. You love it or you hate it.

The agaves used in mezcal are grown in the same way blue agave is grown for tequila: the flowering stalk of the plant is cut off to divert growth into the central stalk, which then swells with sweet, juicy pulp. To make tequila, the central stalk is cooked with steam. Mezcal gets its smoky flavor from a unique cooking process: the juicy core of the agave is cooked underground, in ovens powered by wood charcoal. Some mezcal makers minimize the smokiness of their mescals, but for this recipe, I like a medium to strongly smoky spirit.

I've split the base spirit for this cocktail so the smoky mezcal doesn't overwhelm the other flavors. You'll still taste plenty of smoke, but the warm flavor of the reposado tequila adds mellow notes that balance the sharp mezcal. Both silverberry and sumac contribute acidity, and the acorn orgeat adds a touch of sweetness as well as an almost smoky bitter note that brings us full circle back to the mezcal. A dash of sumac bitters keeps the egg whites smelling fresh while they age. (See Using Egg Whites.)

INGREDIENTS

- **1** ounce mezcal
- **1** ounce reposado tequila
- **¾** ounce silverberry juice
- **½** ounce acorn orgeat
- **1** tablespoon egg white
- **2** ounces sumac soda
- Sumac bitters

TO MAKE ONE DRINK

Combine the mezcal, tequila, silverberry juice, acorn orgeat, and egg white in a shaker and dry-shake for 30 seconds. Add ice to the shaker and shake again for 30 seconds to thoroughly chill the cocktail. Strain into a rocks glass and top with the sumac soda and a few shakes of bitters.

Foraged Bitters Components

The following wild plants make excellent bitters components. Many are available across the country and several are invasive or weedy plants that no one will mind you pulling up. If you're not going to use your ingredients right away, you'll need to preserve them. Dried ingredients should be stored in glass jars, out of direct sunlight. Frozen ingredients will last longer if

they are frozen in a single layer on a cookie sheet, then transferred to ziplock or vacuum-sealed bags.

BITTER COMPONENTS

BARBERRY (*Berberis thunbergii*, *B. vulgaris*) is plentiful and easy to recognize. It has been declared invasive in 20 states, and the US National Park Service asks that no one plant this shrub because of its invasive nature. They suggest hand pulling young plants and using tools to remove larger, more established plants. Barberry roots are bright yellow and have a strong bitter flavor. The root is much easier to chop while fresh, so clean it, give it a rough chop into pieces about c inch long, then dry the pieces at 125 to 130°F (50–55°C) for as long as it takes for them to dry completely. (The dried root pieces should be brittle and not bendable.)

BLACK WALNUT (*Juglans nigra*) leaf is a relatively mild bitter ingredient with a pronounced tannic flavor, like that of black tea. Harvest the fresh leaves in late spring or early summer and dry them at 95°F (35°C) in a dehydrator.

BURDOCK (*Arctium lappa*) root can be tough to dig up because of its size and tenacity. Burdock roots are often more than 12 inches long; one root will give you more than you need for a batch of bitters. This is a relatively common weed, so you can harvest it without worrying about putting a dent in the burdock population. Burdock is a biennial, and the roots are biggest at the end of the first year's growth, before the second

year's growth begins, so harvest in late fall or early spring. I suggest dehydrating them like barberry roots if you have the equipment, but freezing works, too.

CALIFORNIA BAY (*Umbellularia californica*) is only native to a small part of coastal Northern California and southern Oregon, but it's worth making friends with someone from that area to ensure a regular supply of its nuts. While roasted nuts are great for baking, the shelled raw nuts make an interesting bitter infusion.

DANDELION (*Taraxacum officinale*) root can be used fresh or dried, and since it's a common (some might say pernicious) weed, this is something you can find easily. The roots are thickest and best in spring or fall, when they're full of stored nutrition. Dig up the roots, scrub off the dirt, then decide how you'd like to preserve them. Dehydrate them like barberry roots, or freeze them.

DEVIL'S CLUB (*Oplopanax horridus*) is considered a nuisance plant by some people and a valued medicinal by others. It's a common understory plant in the Pacific Northwest and northern Rocky Mountains and most often grows in damp soils. It is seriously prickly, so watch out! The bitter root can be used fresh or dry.

JUNIPER (*Juniperus* spp.) berries are a traditional flavoring for gin, but when heavily concentrated, the flavor is intensely bitter. I suggest drying the fruits to preserve the harvest. Pick only dark purple/blue berries for the best flavor. Break up

dried berries in a spice grinder or mortar and pestle. You want a rough grind, not a fine powder.

MUGWORT (*Artemisia vulgaris*) is a highly invasive weed, and both its roots and leaves are good bitters ingredients. The roots can be pulled, cleaned, chopped, and dried, then stored for future use. The leaves can be dried and used both as a bitters ingredient or as a cocktail flavoring (see Primitive Paloma).

YARROW (*Achillea millefolium*) roots and leaves are mild bitters ingredients. Both can be used fresh or dried, although the flavor of the roots is more bitter than that of the leaves.

YELLOW OR CURLY DOCK (*Rumex crispus*) is a plentiful weed with a useful bitter root. Dig them and dry as you would burdock or dandelion. Bonus: the leaves are a tasty, tart wild green.

SPICE COMPONENTS

BEE BALM (*Monarda* spp.) leaves and flowers make an excellent oregano substitute, although their flavor is slightly more delicate. Bee balm is a savory, warm spice for homemade bitters and can be used fresh or dry.

LAVENDER (*Lavandula* spp.) flower buds have the most flavor just before they open. Dry them for long-term storage.

LICORICE FERN (*Polypodium glycyrrhiza*) root has a strong licorice flavor and a little bit of natural sweetness. It's delicious

to chew on when it's raw and juicy but should be dried for long-term storage.

PEQUIN CHILES (*Capsicum annuum* var. *glabriusculum*) is native to central Texas and has spread to neighboring states. It is widely distributed by birds and often found growing wild. Don't let the small size fool you; this is a hot pepper. Dry them for long-term storage.

PINK PEPPERCORNS (*Schinus molle*) aren't true peppercorns, but they do have a similar flavor: spicy and sharp, without the heat of black pepper. Dry them for long-term storage.

SASSAFRAS (*Sassafras albidum*) is a common tree in the eastern United States and once you've agreed that the USDA ban was unnecessary, it's worth experimenting with its concentrated and complex flavor. The root is sweet and spicy. They can be dried or frozen for long-term storage.

SCHISANDRA (*Schisandra chinensis*) is an ornamental garden vine with white or pink flowers and plentiful red berries. In China the berries are known as five-flavor fruit, and their taste is unique and complex. Dry the berries and use them whole.

SPICEBUSH (*Lindera benzoin*) berries are the fruit of the spicebush shrub. Drying concentrates their flavor, which is often compared to that of allspice and black pepper, combined.

SUMAC berries are tart and lemony and can be used whole in bitters. Many species of sumac produce tart fruit, including staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*), smooth sumac (*R. glabra*), and

three-leaved sumac (*R. trilobata*). Don't worry about mistaking edible sumac for poison sumac. Poison sumac is a rare plant, and its fruit hangs down in loose clusters of white berries. If your sumac has clusters of red fruit, you're good to go. Sumac can be used fresh or dried for longer storage.

WILD GINGER (*Asarum canadense*, *A. caudatum*) rhizomes have a darker flavor than tropical ginger but with a similar complexity and warmth. The strong taste holds its own in bitters. You may either freeze or dry the roots for long-term storage.

FRUIT/BERRY COMPONENTS

BLACKBERRIES (*Rubus fruticosus*) and other brambleberries can be used whole in bitters. Blackberries often have a stronger flavor than other bramble fruit, which makes them a good candidate for bitters, since they have to stand up to so many other intensely flavored ingredients. Freeze ripe berries to use later.

CHOKEBERRIES (*Aronia melanocarpa*, *A. arbutifolia*) are sour fruits and can be used whole, fresh, frozen, or dried. The dark fruits of *A. melanocarpa* will also add color to the bitters.

CORNELIAN CHERRIES (*Cornus canadensis*) are intensely sour fruits that can be used whole, whether frozen or fresh, in bitters.

CRAB APPLES (*Malus* spp.) range from tart to sour and add excellent flavor to homemade bitters. Roughly chop the fruit to expose more surface area to the base spirit during infusion. Crab apples should be frozen for long-term storage.

ELDERBERRIES (*Sambucus* spp.) can be used whole in bitters but remove the stems first; they may contain cyanogenic glycosides (toxic when consumed in large amounts), but don't worry if a few small stems make it through. Elderberries also add a nice color to your infusion and can be used frozen or fresh.

FLOWERING QUINCE (*Chaenomeles japonica*) fruit is extremely tart and fragrant. Roughly chop this fruit before adding it to your bitters maceration. You may use them fresh or frozen.

JAPANESE KNOTWEED (*Fallopia japonica*) stems are tart and lemony. They can be used fresh or frozen and should be roughly chopped before being added to your bitters maceration.

JUNEBERRIES (*Amelanchier* spp.) are mild and sweet and can be used whole in your bitters mix. They work best frozen or fresh.

OREGON GRAPES (*Mahonia aquifolium*) are very sour with just an edge of sweetness. They can be used whole, whether frozen or fresh.

SILVERBERRIES (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) are sweet/tart and can be used whole, whether frozen or fresh. There's no need to remove the seed when using the fruit in a maceration.

CHAPTER SIX

Last but Not Least: Base Spirits

I encourage you to experiment with combining spirits and foraged flavors. Take chances, follow your gut. The more you do it, the better you'll do it. Think about the flavor of the base spirit first, then ask yourself if you want something that contrasts with that flavor or something that echoes its flavor profile. For example, gins often have a floral flavor profile. They combine well with equally floral flavors, such as lavender (see Santa Fe Sundowner) and also with acidic, tangy flavors, like sumac berries (see Sumac Spritzer). Sweet spirits like bourbons play well with bitter ingredients, and the sharp, spicy flavor of a quality rye works with just about anything.

Here are a few philosophical guidelines to get you started.

1. Taste a spirit straight up before using it in a cocktail. It's important to understand every flavor you'll be using.
2. Make yourself a mini cocktail the first time you sample a recipe. If you don't like it, you haven't wasted much.
3. Don't be afraid to use premium ingredients (single-malt whisky or high-quality gin) in a cocktail. Excellent ingredients help make an excellent mixed drink.
4. If you're working with a subtle flavor, infuse or combine it with vodka first. Since vodka doesn't contribute a flavor of its own, it allows the foraged ingredient to shine.
5. If you'd like to taste a spirit but don't want to invest in a big (i.e., expensive) bottle, look for sample-size bottles at your local liquor store.

BOURBON

According to US law, bourbon whiskey must be made from at least 51 percent corn and can only be produced in the United States. It must be aged in new, charred oak barrels. Those are the rules.

Within the category you'll find plenty of variation, and that's due to the remaining 49 percent of the grain. Traditional bourbons, like Jim Beam, Knob Creek, and Wild Turkey, usually use about 70 percent corn and approximately equal amounts of

rye and barley. Sweeter bourbons like Maker's Mark and Pappy Van Winkle include corn, barley, and wheat (rather than rye).

Bourbon tends to be sweet and silky in mouthfeel. Each category of bourbon has something to recommend it and blends well with different wild edible plants. Take the sweetness and spice level of each bourbon into consideration when you're creating foraged cocktails.

BRANDY

Brandy is a spirit distilled from wine or any fermented fruit juice. It includes cognac, Armagnac, grappa, calvados, eau-de-vie, and pisco. The distillation process not only increases the ABV of the wine or fermented juice (most brandies range from 35 to 60 percent ABV) but also introduces new flavors via the application of heat. Brandy is usually consumed at room temperature as a digestif. It's also used to fortify wines and is a popular cocktail ingredient.

Different gradations of brandy refer to the length of time it has been aged in casks. These time periods are strictly regulated by the French government for cognacs and Armagnacs and may be used more generally for other types of brandy.

V.S. stands for Very Special and marks a brandy that has been cask aged for at least 2 years.

V.S.O.P. means Very Superior Old Pale and describes a brandy stored for at least 4 years in a cask.

XO AND NAPOLÉON denote brandies aged for at least 6 years.

GIN

Gin is a distilled spirit primarily associated with the flavor of juniper berries. There are several important classifications of gin:

LONDON DRY GIN is the most common type of gin and its juniper berry flavor is quite pronounced. Beefeater, Tanqueray, and Bombay Sapphire are well-known London dry gins. London dry gins also often include citrus notes.

PLYMOUTH GIN is similar to London dry but slightly sweeter. According to British law, it can only be made in Plymouth, England. The only brand currently in production is produced by the Black Friars Distillery.

FLORAL GIN is not a strict technical definition but refers to gins with less emphasis on juniper flavor and more emphasis on prominent alternative botanical flavors.

NAVY-STRENGTH GIN is bottled at 57 percent ABV, whereas most gin is bottled at 40 percent ABV. The story goes that gins with lower ABVs might, if spilled on gunpowder, prevent that gunpowder from igniting. On a naval vessel that could be a problem, so British naval vessels were supplied with navy-strength gin.

RUM

Rum is primarily distilled from fermented molasses or fermented sugarcane juice. Most rum comes from the Caribbean islands and Latin America, where sugarcane is a major crop. The French-speaking Caribbean islands generally use fresh sugarcane juice rather than molasses; rum produced this way is known as agricultural rum (*rhum agricole*). There is no single set of rules for classifying rum; different countries use different categories and vocabularies to describe their spirits. Here are a few general distinctions.

WHITE RUM has a sweet taste and is often used in cocktails where its lack of pronounced flavor makes it useful for blending. White rums may be aged (although most aren't), but they are usually filtered before being bottled to remove any color obtained through the aging process.

GOLD RUM is aged and golden in color. The color comes from the cask in which the rum was aged, usually charred bourbon barrels. Gold rums often have more flavor than white rums.

DARK RUM is aged longer in heavily charred barrels from which it extracts stronger flavors than either white or gold rum. Dark rums are typical of Jamaica, Haiti, and Martinique and have overtones of spices and caramel.

RYE WHISKEY

US law says that American rye whiskey must be made from at least 51 percent rye and aged in new, charred oak barrels. The other ingredients are usually corn and barley. There is no aging requirement for rye, but when the spirit is aged for more than 2 years, it may be labeled straight rye. Rye is crisper, spicier, and leaner than bourbon. I love rye. It's the gin of brown liquors, and by that I mean it's versatile and flexible and goes well with just about everything.

Canadian whisky is often called rye because it was historically distilled from rye. However, it is not bound by the same rules as American rye and while it often (but not always) contains rye grain, it may do so in varying amounts, depending on the brand. The government rules concerning Canadian whisky allow for a variety of grain combinations and proportions. Canadian Club Chairman's Select is made from 100 percent rye, but many Canadian whiskies contain more corn than rye.

SCOTCH

Scotch whisky is made primarily from malted barley but may also include corn and rye. Law in the United Kingdom stipulates that single-malt Scotch must be made from 100 percent malted barley, produced by two distillation runs, and aged in oak casks for at least 3 years. Blended Scotch is the result of blending two or more single malts.

Whisky and whiskey are both spirits distilled from immature, hopless beer. Why the different spellings, you ask? I can't say why, but I can tell you that in Scotland and Canada

people spell *whiskey* with a –y. Elsewhere, it's spelled with an –*ey*. Both are acceptable as far as the dictionary goes (they're listed as alternative spellings for each other). I try to respect the country of origin and spell the spirit the way its maker intended.

TEQUILA

According to Mexican law, only tequila produced in the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, and Tamaulipas can legally be called tequila. Tequila can only be made from blue agave plants; no other species of agave may be used. One hundred percent agave tequila is made entirely from the sugars of blue agave. *Mixto* tequila must be at least 51 percent blue agave sugars, with additional sugars allowed from other sources (usually cane sugars) but not from other agaves. *Mixto* tequila may also contain coloring and flavorings from other sources and can be bottled (not made) outside of Tequila territory.

BLANCO TEQUILA is unaged and is usually less expensive than aged tequilas. Many mixologists consider this the purest form of tequila. It's a clear liquid with sharp flavors.

REPOSADO TEQUILA is aged in oak barrels for 2 to 12 months. The type of barrel varies and will influence the final flavor of the tequila, but in general this short aging period adds smoothness.

GOLD TEQUILA is usually a *mixto* and the gold coloring comes from caramel and oak extract additives. It's usually a less-expensive tequila. Less common are 100 percent agave gold tequilas made from blending blanco and reposado tequilas.

AÑEJO TEQUILA is aged in oak for 1 to 3 years and batches must be no larger than 600 liters. These tequilas are usually smooth and richly flavored.

MEZCAL is made from agave, like tequila, but the underground cooking process, fueled by wood charcoal, gives some mezcals a strong smoky flavor. Mexican law allows for mezcal to be made from many different agaves (not just the blue agave); it generally comes from the Mexican states of Durango, Guerrero, Oaxaca, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas.

VERMOUTH

Vermouth is wine flavored with herbs and spices and fortified with additional distilled spirits, brandy being the most common. It is sometimes called aromatized wine because the herbs and spices give it fragrance as well as flavor. The name comes from the German word for wormwood (*Wermut*), which is a primary flavoring in many vermouths. Wormwood is the common name for several artemisia species, including *Artemisia vulgaris*, more commonly known as mugwort, which is itself a useful foraged cocktail ingredient.

Most people think of vermouth as a classic martini ingredient, but it's useful in lots of different cocktails and is

also quite tasty on its own. Some of the best-known producers of vermouth include Carpano, Noilly Prat, Martini & Rossi, and Cinzano. There are two main categories of vermouth.

DRY VERMOUTH is pale and the primary flavor is bitter and botanical. You may see it labeled French vermouth. It's most commonly used in martinis.

SWEET VERMOUTH is usually (but not always) red. This style of vermouth is sometimes called Italian vermouth and is strongly associated with the Manhattan cocktail. Sweet white vermouth falls between sweet red vermouth and dry vermouth on the sweetness continuum.

VODKA

Vodka is a neutral grain spirit that is valued for having no flavor of its own. It's usually made from grains but may also be distilled from potatoes, beets, or grapes.

Vodka is distilled multiple times, which is essential to producing its neutral flavor. The purity of water used in the process is also important to producing an almost flavorless spirit. Vodka is filtered through charcoal after the final distillation and requires no aging.

If something has no flavor, why use it? The lack of flavor allows the personality of the other ingredients to shine through, and when you're working with precious foraged ingredients, this is a useful characteristic.

Different vodkas may have different mouthfeels, ranging from silky to watery. You may also notice a difference in the amount of heat you feel when you taste a vodka on its own. Generally speaking, a greater number of distillations produces a smoother vodka.

You can buy flavored vodkas, but if you're interested in foraged flavors, you'll probably want to make your own vodka infusions. It's easy to infuse vodkas with flavorful wild plants. Spruce tip vodka, as an example, has a bright citrus flavor that's tasty and versatile.

WINES: SPARKLING WINES

Like still wines, sparkling wines come in all colors and levels of sweetness. Their fizziness is the result of either secondary fermentation, in which the wine is fermented a second time with additional yeast and sugar, or the direct injection of carbon dioxide into the wine.

Champagne is the most famous sparkling wine. According to French law, champagne can only be produced in the Champagne region of France. Most countries abide by this rule, but not all. If you want to be sure you're getting true champagne, check the certificate of origin on the bottle. Carbonation of champagne is regulated and may only be achieved by the traditional method of a secondary fermentation in the bottle. Champagnes may be white or rosé and sweet or dry.

Sparkling wines are produced in many countries, and each has its own name: in Germany you'll buy Sekt, Spanish

sparkling wine is cava, and in Italy you'll find prosecco and Asti. As you become familiar with different vintages and brand names, you'll discover which flavors suit your cocktail needs. Just because a sparkling wine isn't technically a champagne doesn't mean it's not cocktail-worthy.

WINES: PORT AND SHERRY

PORT is a fortified wine made in the Douro River Valley of Portugal. It is most often served as a dessert wine but also makes an interesting cocktail ingredient. Ruby port may be aged either in casks or in neutral containers for up to 3 years. Its flavor is fruity, and it is the least-expensive type of port due to its short aging time. Tawny port is the sweetest style of port and has strong caramel and nut flavors, which it gets from being barrel aged longer than ruby port.

SHERRY is a fortified wine produced in Andalusia, Spain. There are many different types, running the gamut from light and dry (fino and manzanilla) to heavier, darker varieties (oloroso and amontillado). Sherry is often enjoyed plain, as either an aperitif or a digestif, but it can also be used as a cocktail ingredient. Fino sherries will brighten a cocktail and add light acidity, while oloroso brings an almost raisiny sweetness to the glass.

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Urban Outdoor Skills **by Pascal Bauder**

Wild Food Girl **by Erica Marciniec**

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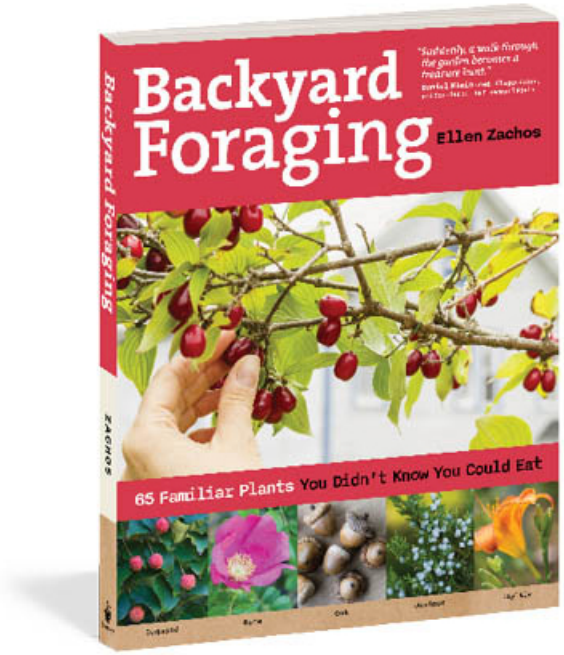

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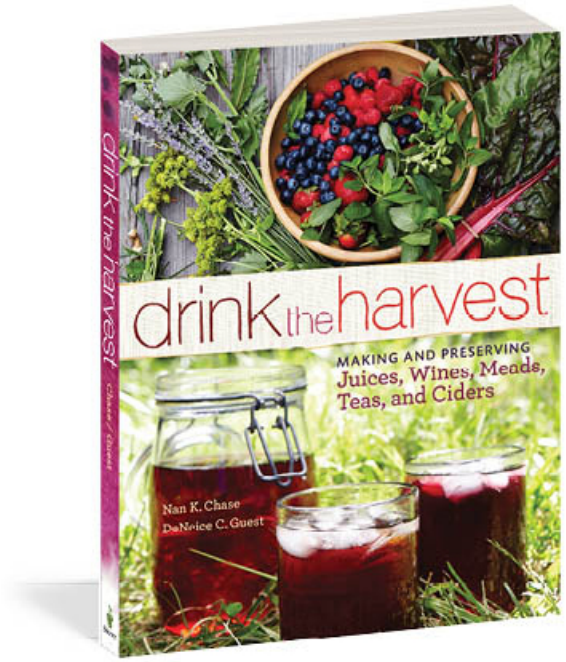

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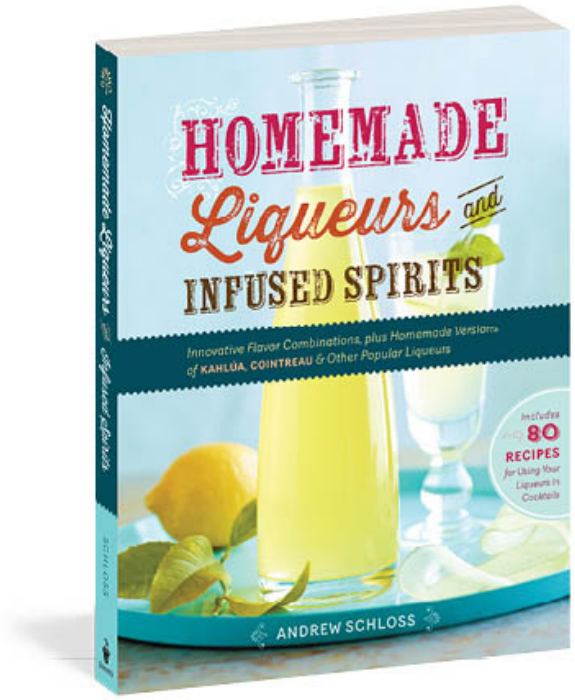

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